

PETER PAUL RUBENS

Hope Rea

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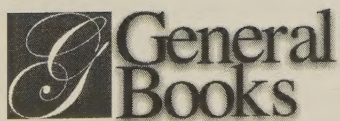
PETER PAUL RUBENS



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PETER PAUL RUBENS

Hope Rea



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INTRODUCTION

THERE is hardly a gallery in Europe having any claim to distinction, which does not preserve one or more works ascribed to the great Fleming, Peter Paul Rubens.

Rubens paintings alone, excluding designs for engraving, number over a thousand, and embrace almost every class of subject capable of artistic handling, whether sacred or profane. Further, the manner of treatment is as varied as are the subjects. We have compositions in the loftiest style, transfused with the grand renaissance spirit; on the other hand we have subjects of the utmost coarseness, depicted unflinchingly, without reserve or bound, the last word frankly said; we have love of nature, shown in tenderest landscape, and most subtle portraiture; and again, instances of pure genre, and further still, acres of decorative canvas, inspired as it would seem to modern eyes, by sycophancy alone.

Before this mass of material, so contradictory in the varying impressions it produces, the observer who tries to gain some acquaintance with the master, must often turn away bewildered, or forced to the unsatisfying conclusion that Rubens is an enigma, a genius not to be comprehended, and moreover so repellent in certain aspects of his art, that even when he is indubitably great, admiration arises almost with

reluctance. A riddle however pre-supposes a solution; and it should be remembered that it is possible for a character while being very complex, to be at the same time exceedingly transparent. That such was the case with Rubens we shall discover if we allow ourselves to trace with sufficient patience the various threads which together make up the web of the great painter's personality; in so doing we may also find, if that be our desire, a solution to the enigma of his apparently self-contradicting art.

Primarily Rubens was an artist, second to none in keenness of observation, truth of eye, skill of hand and facility of expression. All this professional equipment he had in the highest degree, and in common with all the great ones of his craft. But at this point, in the appreciation of artists, we come to a great parting of ways, where the masters separate and take their places in two great ranks, essentially poles asunder. In one of these companies are those who come into the world with a certain message, which they must deliver in their day,—art being their method of expression. To these, their outward life is as nothing, it is merely the opportunity for their art. In themselves they are Seers, in their art they are Revealers. Such were Donatello, Rembrandt, Michelangelo—The world has gained through the works of these a something it will not willingly let die, a definite addition to the sum of our realization of the nature of things.

The artists of the other band, equally great in their professional equipment, come into the world for a less definite purpose, and to these in consequence is life, as life, of much higher importance, and in their art they express their life.

It is in this second company that Rubens finds his place, their first and highest. His rich, full, varied life is what we see in his art, through the medium of his own attractive personality. So, to appreciate the art, we must first study the man, primarily as artist, and then in all the multifarious relations of his life; that towards religion, for example, to morals, to the affections, to contemporary manners and culture, to the court, to worldly affairs, to good fellowship, and to patriotism and politics. To all these widespread relations Rubens gave eloquent expression, and herein we find his art. Thus viewed, it ceases to be a maze and an enigma, a play of conflicting forces that are contradictions of themselves, but on the contrary, it is seen to be, though complex, a clear and! transparent revelation of its own creator, the painter) Peter Paul. It is he whom we meet in all his work, and through the medium of his personality we see as it were a face to face, at its best and brightest, the life and thought and sentiment of his country and his age.

Rubens realizes to the last letter Gustave le Bons definition of the artist, who, he writes:

"Whether poet, architect, or painter possesses the magic faculty of expressing in his synthesis the soul of an epoch and of a race; very impressionable, very unconscious, thinking more especially in images, and reasoning but little. Artists are at certain epochs the faithful mirrors of the society in which they live; their works are the most exact documents to which recourse can be had, with a view to waking a vanished civilization. They are too unconscious not to be sincere, and too much impressed by their surroundings not to give faithful expression to the ideas, sentiments, and tendencies of their environment."

This paragraph might have been penned with the great Fleming specially in view.

RUBENS

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND YOUTH

THE immeasurable industry of critics and historians seems, after years of research, to have established the fact that Rubens the painter was born in 1577 A. D. in the little German town of Siegen.

The circumstances attending his birth in this place are at once painful and romantic, and reflect as much honour upon one of his parents as the reverse upon the other. John Rubens, the father of Peter Paul, was an accomplished lawyer, enjoying considerable eminence in his profession as an alderman of the town of Antwerp. Having however inclined too openly towards the Calvinistic party in the city, on the advent of the Duke of Alva he found it necessary in 1568, for his own safety and that of his family, to exile himself to a distance, and accordingly settled in Cologne.

There he attached himself, in the capacity of steward and legal adviser, to Anne, wife of William the Silent, at that time also resident in Cologne, having refused to accompany her husband in his life of camp and field. Dr. Rubens seems to have been a man of great personal charm, as well as of ability and learning and his position

in the estimation of the princess became so established, that on the occasion of her leaving Cologne for the smaller town of Siegen, within the domains of her husband's brother, where she might exercise the more rigid economy her circumstances rendered necessary, she confided two of her children to the care of Rubens and Maria Pypelinx his wife, while the doctor himself was required to be frequently in personal attendance on his patroness in her retirement at Siegen.

Annes marriage with her illustrious husband was unhappy, the more so as each had cause to complain of the infidelity of the other. But in Anne there appears to have been no compensating nobility in any other relation of life,—she was frankly a woman of low morale, as well as of unattractive temper.

She however acquired influence over her legal adviser; so much so, that in the end it was not without reason, that on setting out one day for a professional visit to Siegen, the latter was arrested by officers of Count John, Annes brother-in-law, on no less a charge than that of adultery with his patroness. The offence was capital under German law at that day; consequently the unhappy doctor was in the extremest peril, for notwithstanding Annes stout denial of the charge, the prisoner himself, constrained by torture, made full confession, and his additional statement that "he would never have had the audacity to approach her if he had feared a rebuff," probably did not have the intended effect of softening in any degree the resentment of his captors. In the end, Anne also admitted the truth of the accusation, and with a touch of grace confessed that "her conscience smote her in no slight degree for having so ill rewarded the unhappy wife for the services she had rendered her." "Unhappy" was a somewhat inadequate word to apply to Rubens wife at this time. A noble-minded woman herself, she had loved her husband with entire devotion, never dreaming that he could be other than such as she was herself. For three anxious weeks she was left in ignorance of the cause of his absence and silence, and then received a letter, written by himself, from his dungeon, telling her the whole tale, and asking for her pardon.

Her own words in reply to her miserable husband serve best to show the temper of the woman. "How could I," she wrote, "allow my severity to add to your affliction when you are already suffering pains from which I would give my life to deliver you. Even if a long lasting affection had not preceded this misfortune. I could never hate you sufficiently to be unable to pardon a fault towards myself. Rest assured that I have entirely forgiven you: if my pardon was the price that Heaven required for your release, we should be restored to happiness. Alas! that is not what your letter tells me. I could hardly read it, for it seemed my heart must break. I am so distressed that I do not know what I am writing. If there is no longer any pity in the world, to whom can I apply? I shall pray to heaven with infinite tears and lamentations, and I hope that God will hearken and soften the hearts of your captors, that they may spare us, and have compassion on us; otherwise when they kill you they kill me. Never write again your unworthy husband, for everything is forgotten."

Partly owing to the skilfully directed exertions of Maria Pypelinx, and partly to the fear that the execution of the lawyer might only serve to bruit abroad the scandal which it was the desire of the Orange family to hush away, John Rubens was allowed to live. But for two years he was kept a close prisoner, and then liberated only so far as to be allowed to live with his family in the retirement of a house in Siegen, and under the condition of delivering himself up again as prisoner at the first summons: the retirement required, moreover, was so severe, that only in consideration of his broken health was he permitted occasionally "to walk in the open fields."

This mitigation of their sorrow occurred in May, 1573, and the following year a son was born to them, whom they christened Philip, while three years later, in 1577, again another was added to the family, receiving in his turn the names of the two saints Peter and Paul, on the vigil of whose feast day the child was born.

The following year the Rubens were allowed to return to Cologne, where, after suffering the resentment of the House of Orange, with only slight alleviations for nine years, the cause of all his family's distress died. The secret now rested with Maria Pypelinx alone, and she, in her heroic affection and fine pride, determined to be its grave.

There is every reason to believe that her sons, both Philip and Peter Paul, were in absolute ignorance of the cause of the shadow under which their early years were passed, and believed that their father was the object of purely political persecution.

Peter Paul, in fact, made the statement, without any doubt as to its truth, that he was born in Cologne, thus, while he grew up, giving his mother a full measure of affection and respect, of that portion of her life which would have called forth deepest reverence, he was totally unaware, and it is only owing to the researches of the last century that the true circumstances under which the painter was born have been brought to light. With the death of Dr. John Rubens the need for exile ceased. As for Maria Pypelinx, she had perforce been long busied with other matters than the decision as to the rival claims of the new and the older churches. The essence of religion had transfused her life during these troublous years, and she had, perhaps insensibly, by this time sunk back to that form which she had observed in her earlier years, and now called herself a Catholic. Nothing then hindered her return to Antwerp, and her feet were soon upon

the road thitherwards. Before the year was out, she and her children were settled there, and a time of quiet and peace at last opened before her.

At this period Antwerp was at length recovering, to some extent, from the devastations of the "Spanish Fury," and the reprisals of the triumphant "rebel" provinces to her north. True, it had lost its supremacy as a centre of commerce, for the Scheldt being closed, the town was no longer, as formerly, a great port, and Amsterdam was reaping in her stead all the harvest of the sea. But a certain number of manufactories and industries again sprang up in the town, and through the establishment of printing presses, notably that of Plantin, the city became a distinct centre of intellectual life, while Art began to live again, and the beginnings of the School of Antwerp were already in existence.

Maria Pypelinx had managed to secure from the wreck of her family's fortune a comfortable sufficiency, and arrived again at home took a house in the Place de Mier, one of the widest thoroughfares in the town, and thence sent the little Peter Paul to a school of excellent reputation, kept by an accomplished "humanist" and man of piety, Master Rumaldus Verdonck, a member of the Guild of Schoolmasters, and teacher of Latin and Greek.

The site of the school was behind the Cathedral church of Notre Dame, and on that of the present Marché au Lait. Here Peter Paul was well grounded in the rudiments, and here also laid the foundations of certain friendships which were destined to have a lasting influence upon his future life; the chief among these being that with the young Balthasar, son of Jan Moretus, son-in-law of the great printer Plantin, and at that time the director of the Plantin Press.

We gather from various sources that Rubens was at this early age a handsome lad of engaging manners and keen intelligence, doing credit to his masters training, and winning favour in the eyes of all his circle of acquaintances. At home in the quiet house where Maria Pypelinx rested after the turmoils of circumstance and soul which had been her portion for the preceding twenty years, the boy must have enjoyed an atmosphere calculated to foster all that was best in his nature. One can imagine the grave reticent woman, with her wealth of affection, shown probably more in deeds than words, giving a bias, and making of herself a background, to his life, the value of which could hardly be over-estimated. We hear that of his amusements at that time, one of the chief was to copy the illustrations from a large family Bible, of an edition published by Tobias Stimmer in 1576. In this pursuit he was influenced possibly by an elder brother, Jean Baptiste, who, it is thought, was himself something of a painter. Be that as it may, the idea of making painting his profession seems early to have taken possession of the mind of Peter Paul.

Notwithstanding, his first entrance into the world was not as a student of art. At the early age of thirteen, in the year 1590, the family circumstances having apparently become somewhat straitened, he was removed from school, and placed as page in the house of the Countess van Lalaing, the widow of a former governor of the city. This lady lived in considerable state, her household being spoken of more as a miniature court than as a private establishment. Here Rubens stayed a year, receiving training in courtly manner and etiquette, which he turned to good account in after life. "But," says Sandraart, one of his earliest biographers, and a personal acquaintance of

Rubens, "unable to resist the inclination which urged him to painting, he at length obtained from his mother permission to devote himself to it." His first master was a family connection, Tobias Verhaecht, whose name has only remained known through the fact of his having had Rubens for a pupil. He had the unconscious enjoyment of this honour for six months only, after which, for reasons not recorded, the lad passed on to the studio of a more notable artist, by name Adam van Noort. The popular legend respecting this latter is that he was a coarse-mannered boor, who treated his apprentices with severity, and painted pictures only in the uncompromisingly ugly Flemish style, missing alike the earlier delicacy of the schools of Van Eyck and Van de Weyden, and the later suavities of the contemporary Italianizers. So many doubts, however, have been cast on these statements, both as regards the character of the man and his work, by recent criticism, that we may well for the present leave aside the question of Van Noort, pending further research. This much we do know, that Rubens, the brilliant lad of fourteen, fresh from the position of page in a courtly house, remained his pupil for four years, and learned from him the elements of the painter's craft. At the end of this time the boy moved on to another teacher, Otto van Veen, known also as Vaenius, it being a fashionable affectation of the time to Latinize surnames, with the idea of thereby adding to their distinction. Thus we find one of Rubens' chief engravers generally spoken of as Ponjius, his real name being Du Pont.

Of Van Veen, in contrast to Van Noort, we have abundant and reliable information. He was the leading painter in Antwerp of his day, a scholar and a gentleman, much under the influence of Italy, where he had travelled in his earlier years. His style was somewhat academic, and his genius not being of an original order, his productions were tame rather than striking. They nevertheless had qualities which raised them far above the contemporary work of the school; so that probably nowhere else in Antwerp, at that time, could Rubens have found more favourable conditions under which to pursue his studies and make his own experiments. For Van Veen was a generous master, absolutely devoid of jealousy, and apparently rejoicing in the developing genius of his pupil. The whole atmosphere of the house and circle of the elder man was such as to encourage refinement of feeling, general culture, and, above all, appreciation of Italy, the fountain-head of Renaissance art and scholarship. Two years after his entrance into the Van Veen studio, Rubens was received into the Guild of St. Luke, being thus acknowledged as a duly qualified member of his profession. The following year he was chosen to assist his master in the state decoration of the city to celebrate the formal entrance of the new rulers of the obedient provinces, the Archdukes Albert and Isabella. His training and experience was thus, we see, as full and varied as Van Veen could make it. In short, it is on record that the latter "told his pupil all he knew." Equipped then with all that Antwerp could give him of instruction, and already showing signs of possessing forces within himself beyond the power of any master to control or guide, in the spring of the first year of the new century,—in May, 1600,—he too turned his steps southward to the Land beyond the Alps, to take at first hand what Italy had to give of further teaching, and fresher inspiration.

CHAPTER II

YEARS IN ITALY 1600–1608

THE first Cis-Alpine city in which he paused was Venice, her transcendent beauty, in that day, still pulsating with full and vigorous life. To Antwerp, war-impooverished and desolate, Rubens could hardly have lighted upon a more brilliant contrast. The Venice of 1600 must have more than realized his wildest dreams of the beauty of life, and the grandeur of Art, and astounded him with amazed delight.

We have scant, if any record of the emotions aroused during this first vision of an Italian city, but we may believe unhesitatingly that the dazzling impression was such that it never wholly faded from his eyes. His most original and strongly individual creations, to his latest day, have that about them which one cannot think they would have possessed had Venice not stamped her image indelibly upon his very being.

Hardly had he been there more than a few weeks, than the fortune he had come to seek began to show herself, and in most attractive guise.

Staying in the city for a few days in July was one of the most glittering notabilities of the peninsula, Vincenzo Gonzaga, sovereign Duke of Mantua. One of the gentlemen of his household happened to make the acquaintance of the young Flemish artist, who showed him some specimens of his work. Struck by their quality, the courtier brought them to the notice of his master; he in his turn being pleased alike by the pictures and the appearance and manner of the artist, took him forthwith into his service, and gave him a position among his followers, which Rubens was content to occupy for the next eight years.

Our painter was destined to see much of courts and court life, hence his first experience as a page was, under the circumstances, hardly lost time; now he was to play a more important role, for though indefatigable as a painter, his employers seem never to have contented themselves with his services as such, but always demanded from him labours quite apart from Art, his many other gifts and admirable *savoir faire* being invariably recognized, and as frequently utilized, by his princely patrons.

The Duke Vincenzo hurried away from Venice, and, just passing through Mantua, proceeded to Florence to assist at the marriage of his sister-in-law, Marie de Medici, to the French king, Henry IV. The fetes on the occasion were sumptuous, and the Mantuan party took their full share in their enjoyment of them. From Florence the duke passed on to Genoa, where he made a lengthened stay, and not until about Christmas time did he settle down at home in Mantua. In all this journeying from city to city he carried Rubens along with him, thus providing the young man with a continuous series of opportunities for study and development. In Florence, for example, what must the artistic wealth have been before the half of it had been distributed among all the principal museums of Europe? All this was before his eyes during his stay there, while the city itself, in its severe beauty and lovely situation, decked out with all the grandeur of the marriage feast, must have presented one long picture of restrained loveliness difficult to surpass. Genoa, however, the city of palaces, seems to have impressed the young Fleming more deeply than Florence; he was always pre-eminently a man of his own day, entirely at one with it,—and the special quality of Florentine beauty is one that appeals more strongly to our own time than it did to that of Rubens. Genoa ranked in his mind almost with Venice as an ideal of excellence realized in fact.

The Court of Mantua was in itself well calculated to further a painter's artistic education; it had long been a centre of culture and learning, from the days of Isabella

deste downwards, and artists of the first degree had left their impress on the walls of the then sumptuous ducal palaces. These were two in number: the larger, and residential palace, within the walls of the city, containing the masterpieces of Andrea Mantegna, and the famous Paradise of Isabella deste; and the smaller Palazzo del Te", without the walls, a pleasure-house pure and simple,—a richly decorated series of state apartments and magnificent stables, with central courtyard and extensive gardens,—a stage for ceremonial merry-makings, hunts, pageants, plays, receptions, and all the luxurious decorative gaieties with which an art-loving Italian prince of the Renaissance adorned court life.

As Andrea Mantegna, with his severe classicism, had established the character of the decorations of the old palace, so had Giulio Romano impressed his style and fashion of art upon the Palazzo del Te To both of these masters Rubens gave devoted study; to the former, a

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probably more on account of his classicism than through appreciation of any further qualities in his art, but to the latter with full-hearted admiration of his whole style and manner.

The residence of Rubens at the court of Mantua was important to him not only on account of the opportunities it provided for the study of art, but because it may be said to have also determined largely the whole future tenor of his own life, and materially coloured his entire outlook upon life in general.

In explanation of this, some few words on the place held by the Court in Renaissance society will not be irrelevant, but necessary to a proper understanding of much in both the life and the art of Rubens.

The close of the fifteenth century saw a curious restatement of political relations in western Europe, making for a marked increase of refinement and civilization. In this Italy led the way, and for long years held her preeminence. The leading feature of the change was the gradual centering of power in the hands of the individual princes, with a corresponding diminution of the personal power of the nobles. These, from being turbulent units, capable of flying off at a tangent from the kingly authority when it suited their purpose, gradually became transformed into a totally new order of being, namely, the courtier, which title the noblest was proud to accept, since only by attending the court, and through the appointment of the prince, could the career of statesman be entered upon, and political ambitions or ideals be realized. In the courts of Urbino, Mantua, and Ferrara, a romantic ideal had arisen as to the kind of centre the court should be and further of the nature of the prince himself, which was to be no less than the pattern gentleman on whom the courtier should model himself. The prince, in his own person, must be at once alive to all the brilliant interests of Renaissance life,—Art, Learning, and Diplomacy, and, newest art of all in modern Europe, that of living, of bringing elegance and grace into the acts of daily life; in short, all that which came to be summed up, in that day, under the comprehensive word Courtesy. Courtesy and conversation were studied systematically, both in the daily practice of the respective courts themselves, under the influence of the different gifted dukes and their no less brilliant consorts, but also from books written on the subject. // *Cortegiano*. The Courtier, written by Cas-tiglione, himself a courtier in

Mantua, one of the gentleman especially devoted to Isabella deste, had a European reputation and influence, and, with modifications suited to the locality, the courts of Europe beyond the Alps one and all accepted as their model the "Courtesy" of the little princely courts of Italy. Of these, as we have seen, Mantua had been one of the first, and Vincenzo Gonzaga aimed, in his own fashion, at maintaining the traditional brilliancy of his predecessors, while his wife, Leonora de Medici, was one of those gracious Renaissance ladies, who knew how to shed a pure lustre on all their environment. Placed in these surroundings, so agreeable to his natural bent, and for which his gifts so admirably fitted him, Rubens imbibed the court spirit to the full extent of his capacity. Hence, in our study of the man, it must be borne in mind throughout, that accepting unquestioningly the political ideal of his day, he was by training, as well as by natural inclination, a courtier in the Renaissance sense of the word. To his abiding credit, however, be it also remembered, that while the ordinary courtier adopted the life of the court as a career out of which he expected primarily or incidentally to carve his fortune, Rubens remained always painter by profession, and when he became in practice as well as in temper the courtier, he did so from entirely disinterested motives, in order to serve either his sovereign or his country.

In the summer of 1601 the Duke Vincenzo prepared to take some part in the war then waged against the Turk; so his painter was liberated for the time being from court duties. Armed with a letter of introduction from his master to the Cardinal Montalto, he took the opportunity offered him by circumstances to proceed a stage further on his artists pilgrimage, and accordingly arrived in Rome early in August.

There, despite the heat, he gave himself to unremitting study; one of his early biographers records that "he turned to account the things he liked, sometimes by copying them, sometimes by making notes, accompanied usually by a slight pen and ink drawing, invariably carrying with him a blank note book for that purpose." Monuments of antiquity had always a special fascination for him, and the study of these, together with the works of Raphael and Michael Angelo, served as a salutary complement to the influence of Venetian Art which had been the first to enthrall his imagination.

But in these days of the early seventeenth century, the artistic interest of Rome did not as yet lie entirely in the past. The course of the Italian School of Painting had not then quite run to its close; hence among the great events of the young Flemish painters first visit to the ancient city was his introduction to Caravaggio, one of the later masters of the school, not an eclectic, but a first-hand student of certain aspects of nature, and a definite contributor to the sum of artistic knowledge. Rubens came under his influence at this date, and derived distinct profit from the connection. Another event of passing importance was a much-needed commission. This was to paint an altar-piece for the church of Santa Croce di Gerusalemme, a church which gave its name as title to one member of the Sacred College. A short time previously the Cardinalate of Santa Croce had been held by the Archduke Albert of Flanders, but owing to his appointment as regent of those provinces, he had abandoned the profession of ecclesiastic, which had never been his choice, and now, in order to placate the papal court, which looked askance on his conciliatory policy in the Netherlands, he offered to present an altar-piece to his late church in Rome. Rubens home connections being

good, and his relations active in his interest, he was not forgotten, and the commission to paint the altar-piece was confided to him. The Duke of Mantua, his magnificence notwithstanding, was but a poor paymaster; Rubens was accordingly glad to undertake the work, and painted the altar-piece in three parts, the subjects being respectively St. Helena, an Ecce Homo and the Raising of the Cross. These, now preserved in the municipal Hospital of Grasse, are the earliest authentic works from his hand.

This being completed, Rubens returned to Mantua, but what the work at this time demanded of him by his master we have no record; we know, however, the projects which the duke had in view at this time as regards art: one, to collect copies of celebrated Madonnas by acknowledged masters, these to be obtained on the most thrifty terms that could be arranged; and the other was the gathering of a second collection of portraits "of the most beautiful women in the world, princesses or ordinary individuals." We do not hear precisely of Rubens being employed on either one or the other of these two artistic enterprises; yet that he had established a reputation for judgement in matters of art, as well as in general affairs is shown by the mission on which he was now to be sent by his patron.

In steering the somewhat perilous course of his little duchy among the dangers of rival and larger states, it had become necessary for the Duke Vincenzo to secure the friendship of the King of Spain. Some presents, judiciously selected and distributed, were deemed to be, for the moment, the best means of effecting this end. For the sport-loving Spanish king, some horses from the then renowned Gonzaga stables were chosen; certain relics, for a powerful member of the court renowned for piety; for another, tapestries; while for the Duke of Lerma, the king's chief minister, copies by a Mantuan painter of some of Raphaels principal works. The mission was obviously a delicate one, not only were the gifts to be tactfully presented, but the envoy was if possible to create personally a pleasing impression, and, moreover, gather the feeling of all the more important personages of the Spanish Court towards that of Mantua. To make a long story short, the chosen messenger between Mantua and Spain was the Flemish painter Peter Paul. March 5th, 1603, was the date of his departure, but so troublous was the journey, and so great the delays experienced by the young envoy, even after he had arrived in Spain,—then, as now, the Land of mahana,—that it was not until July

that the gifts were duly presented, while he was not able to complete his mission in other respects until after the close of the year, his arrival back in Mantua being in January or February, 1604. This journey was of slight importance to the painter from the point of view of art. It served, however, to increase his knowledge of the world, and of courts, and confirmed his reputation for discretion and honesty in the minds of all with whom he had established relations. So much was this the case with the duke himself, that in the following June he renewed his contract with Rubens, granting "to Peter Paul, painter, a provision of 400 ducatoons a year, payable every three months, from May 24th;" while shortly afterwards he gave him a commission more worthy of his powers than the roving one with which he had been sent to Spain, to wit, that of painting any court beauty whom he could persuade to sit to him, so that the portrait might be added to the Mantuan collection.

In August 1604, the duke's mother died, and he determined to decorate the chapel dedicated to her memory with some notable paintings; and these he desired Peter Paul to execute. Now dispersed, and much mutilated, the remains of these works yet show the artists' growing powers, and that in their original condition they must have added much to his reputation. These and other works for the duke occupied him for nearly two years, after which he again obtained leave of absence for a while, and repaired a second time to Rome, where he resumed his favourite studies, this time with the additional pleasure of having the companionship of his brother Philip, between whom and himself existed the strongest affection. A charming record of this fraternal

Hanfs. lat: glphoto PMipalace, Florence

THE PHILOSOPHERS feeling, and the fellowship of the period, exists in a portrait group painted at the time, representing the two brothers, Philip and Peter Paul, with Justus Lipsius, a noted professor of Louvain and Philip's master, and a fourth, who, in the opinion of M. Max Rooses, is John Wouwerius, an intimate friend of the two brothers. This painting is now in the Pitti Palace, and bears the title of *The Four Philosophers*. Philip Rubens, himself an accomplished Latinist and man of letters, occupied at this date the position of librarian and secretary to the Cardinal Ascanio Colonna, having been recommended to the post by his old professor Justus Lipsius. The two brothers lodged together in the Via della Croce, near the Piazza di Spagna, and, being both ardent antiquarians, worked together, finding in Rome an ample field for research. Philip afterwards embodied the result of his labours in book form. The work was printed on his return home by the Plantin Press, and embellished by plates from drawings by Peter Paul; in the preface the author refers to the artist as "the brother, whose skilful hand and excellent and accurate judgement had been so great a help to me in this work."

Another painting by Peter Paul, belonging, in the opinion of some authorities, to this period, has again a pleasant personal interest. The, perhaps over-laborious, student fell ill in the heat of July, 1604, and was restored to health by the skill of a German physician, Dr. John Faber, then resident in Rome. The latter, recording his relations with Rubens, writes as follows: "One day, by the grace of God, I cured P. P. Rubens of a severe attack of pleurisy, and he painted me a cock accompanied by this humorous inscription: To the celebrated Johan Faber, doctor of medicine, my Aesculapius, I dedicate this picture, in fulfilment of my vow, made for my recovery when I was condemned." Unhappily this pleasant piece of humour on the part of the young painter has been lost beyond recovery.

Supplies coming from Mantua but irregularly, at the best, it became necessary for Rubens to look out for some remunerative work; happily for him, his connections and abilities procured for him in the autumn the commission to paint a large work representing St. Gregory and other saints, for the high altar of an important Roman church, that known as the Chiesa Nuova. The work was not entirely completed when he was peremptorily summoned to attend his patron; he accordingly returned, and accompanied the duke to Genoa. This was a sojourn submitted to most unwillingly on the painter's part. It was now July, 1607, and in the April before Philip Rubens had returned to Antwerp, hastening his departure on hearing ill news with regard to his mother's health. Peter Paul had been unable to go with him, and was still

further detained. He made, however, characteristic use of his time by executing commissions for various Genoese noblemen, and making a serious study of the palace architecture of the city. At length he was permitted to return to Rome to finish his altar-piece for the Chiesa Nuova, but again other delays occurred. Owing to the defective lighting of the church a replica of his picture executed on a duller background was rendered necessary. This took time, and further, left the original canvas on the painters hands. This unexpected additional work for the Chiesa Nuova, and other commissions which he undertook, held him in Rome through the next spring and even the following summer. The duke also showed himself most unwilling to allow his painter to cross the Alps. In October, 1608, however, news again reaching him of his mothers still increasing weakness, he at last decided to act without waiting further for ducal permission, and set out on the journey northwards. On his all too tardy arrival in Antwerp, he learned that his mother, Maria Pypelinx, had died even before he received the last news concerning her condition.

He took up his quarters, sadly enough, we must think, in her old house, and then, listening to the persuasions of his sagacious brother, came to the decision that Antwerp after all offered a more independent and better field for his activities than the Mantuan court. Accordingly, with feelings of presumably mingled regret and relief, Peter Paul formally severed his connection with the House of Gonzaga, and determined to throw in his lot with his own people and work among them, and for that land which had the greatest claim upon his loyalty and service.

CHAPTER III

SETTLEMENT IN ANTWERP

THE year 1609 was one of vast importance not only to the painter Rubens, but also to his chosen home, the city of Antwerp. It was the first of the twelve years truce with the United Provinces, which meant for Antwerp an untold sense of respite and relief. At length, after years of fear and unrest and desolation, she was able to direct thought and energy to her own restoration; and though the fact that her river, the Scheldt, remained closed, forbade a full return to her former prosperity, further activity in some of the arts of peace nevertheless became a possibility.

It was doubtless not without full consciousness of the commercial possibilities of the moment that Peter Paul decided on his settlement in Antwerp, and the event proved the soundness of his judgement. Established in the Klooster Straat with his brother Philip, who, since his return from Italy, had occupied the honourable position of municipal secretary, Peter Paul found the doors of the best society of the city, literary as well as artistic, at once open to him.

Among the interesting intellectual circles of that time was the Guild of the so-called "Romanists," its members being scholars and artists who had resided in Italy. The Dean of the Guild in 1609 was the painter Jean Breughel, named "the Velvet," somewhat quaint and limited as an artist, but entirely admirable as a man; by him Rubens was admitted to the society, and a strong friendship soon sprang up between the elder and the younger artist.

Even more practical evidences of the welcome the town was prepared to extend to the returned traveller were two commissions for paintings, one from the Church and one from the municipality. The latter had determined to re-decorate the state chamber

of the Town Hall, and entrusted Rubens with the commission for a large composition to fill the space opposite the fireplace. For this he was to receive the comparatively handsome payment of 1,800 florins. The subject chosen was *The Adoration of the Kings*, which when completed formed the first of a long series of paintings of the same story, one of which he seemed never to tire; finding it the occasion for infinite variety in costume, figure, light, and accessory, he never painted twice the same conception, but each time it appeared a new picture worked out with a differing artistic aim.

This first *Adoration*, though inferior in many points to its later brethren, was however so far superior to what could have been obtained from the hand of any other painter of the city, that it at once established Rubens place among his fellow artists and his reputation with the outside world. Accordingly we find him appointed this same year court painter to the archdukes, with a fixed salary of 500 Flemish pounds, certain definite civic privileges, and permission to continue his residence in Antwerp, instead of being in attendance at Brussels, where the court had its seat.

Arrived now at the age of thirty-two, and with an honourable position assured to him, Rubens determined to put the final seal upon his settlement at home, and on 8th October of the same eventful year he married his first wife, Isabella Brant, the eighteen-year-old daughter of an old and valued friend of the Rubens family.

To about this date belongs another interesting autobiographical painting, that of Rubens and his Bride, now preserved in the Munich Gallery. In *Isabella* we see a somewhat quaint yet withal winsome beauty, with a shrewd and humorous expression; in her general aspect there is a dainty charm, altogether captivating. She sits at her handsome husband's feet, with an air of caressing admiration, while the twitching lips indicate that, notwithstanding the pose she has chosen, she is no blind worshipper, but capable of quite an appreciable degree of gentle raillery, directed even against her illustrious goodman. And what we see in her, be it noted, is what is shown to us by her husband's own hand, as directed by his proper vision; so that the painting stands as a most charming record of their mutual relations. Looking upon it we can plainly see an additional reason for the marked change which made itself manifest in his art from this date.

The peace in the political world coincided, as we have seen, with this beginning of his domestic happiness, and his establishment in his own country. This combination of events, it would seem, gave the occasion for a certain mental pause,—an act of recollection,—not such a pause as is marked by any outward cessation of work, but one of those mental states of which only the intellect concerned is aware, when for the moment it gathers its forces into itself, or realizes its strength, so that it may pour

Hanfstiinglp! wto Munich Gallery

RUBENS AND ISABELLA BRANT IN THE ARBOUR forth anew, but with the direction of the flowing changed, and the intention altered, by the new inspiration received in that one great moment.

During his long apprentice years, up to the age of thirty-two, Rubens attitude had ever been that of a learner, his prime aim to gather and absorb at all hands; while, as regards outward circumstances, his position had been that of a subordinate, subject always to a master's wishes and commands. In one year all this was changed. His mother dead, he was brought to the front rank in his generation, and himself become

the head of a house he was master of his own time and movements: above all, he was no longer in that land where every turn gave him fresh occasion for the absorption of new ideas and knowledge: in place of Italy he had about him his own desolated Antwerp, crying out for a renewal of her lost beauty and her worth. It was for him now to give out rather than to take in, to assimilate what Italy had bestowed, and then realizing his proper self to express that self through his art. Nobly he rose to the occasion. Hitherto, if the works of his first period are examined, we find an extraordinary number of pasticci, figures, ideas, groups, borrowed wholesale, and indifferently woven together. Henceforward, while still showing how much he owed to Cis-Alpine art, his presentation of the themes chosen is his own; the thought has passed through the crucible of his intellectual being, and the outward result is a something Rubens own and not anothers.

The entrance into this second period of the painters life is marked in his art by those two paintings which are most generally associated with his name, *The Elevation of*, and *The Descent from the Cross*. The commission for the first was given in 1610, and the last instalment of its price was paid in 1613. Originally painted for the Church of St. Walburga, it is now to be seen in the north transept of Antwerp Cathedral, where it forms a pendant to the second and equally well-known triptych, *The Descent from the Cross*. This latter was a commission from the Guild of the Arquebusiers, a company corresponding in Antwerp to that in Amsterdam, for which some years later Rembrandt painted his great picture, *The Night Watch*. In the case of the Netherlands, these civic Guilds maintained their religious character, and the Antwerp Arquebusiers being under the patronage of St. Christopher, they requested Rubens to represent the legend of that saint in the painting which they required. The artist, however, gained permission to extend the subject somewhat, from the one Christ-bearer, Christopher himself, to a series of scenes in which the Christ-bearing in one form or another was the principal interest. Accordingly the triptych as now seen in Antwerp Cathedral came to be painted, the centre panel representing the Deposition or Descent from the Cross, while the left and right hands represent respectively *The Visitation* and *The Presentation*: St. Christopher himself appears on the outer side of the wing, and is seen only when the triptych is closed.

While busy with these important undertakings, Rubens was careful to take further steps necessary to his complete establishment in Antwerp. On his marriage he had for a time betaken himself to the house of his wifes father, but in January, 1611, he purchased a dwelling-place of his own, on the Wapper; "a house with a large door, a courtyard, a gallery, kitchen, rooms,

Antwerp Cathedral

THE DESCENT FROM THE CROSS land, and dependencies, with a bleaching-ground adjoining the east side of the Company of the Arquebusiers." He had already in thrifty fashion become an art collector, and gathered in Italy and elsewhere many objects of great artistic interest and value. The importance of his commissions also necessitated a large studio, and again further accommodation was needed for the numerous pupils who now eagerly sought his instruction, so much so that he was in many cases obliged to refuse the application. All these considerations rendered a separate establishment most desirable, and that it should be of ample proportions; so

the house on the Wapper being bought, alterations were at once designed to fit it for all these many needs and requirements.

The following March, Isabella gave birth to a daughter, who was named Clara, after her mother's mother. It may be noted here, that later Isabella had two other children, Albert, born in 1614, and Nicholas, born in 1618. A great grief, however, followed upon the quick succession of joys and successes which fell to him in the first years of Rubens' return home. In August, 1611, his brother Philip died, at the premature age of thirty-eight. Some critics place the painting of *The Philosophers* mentioned above, shortly after this event, and consider it as a memorial offering to his dead brother, rather than a commemoration of his living companionship, enjoyed a few years previously. But whatever the precise date or motive of its painting, it remains to us as a precious record of the brother who up to now had been one of the greatest personal factors in the painter's life, and we may be very sure that his loss was severely felt by Peter Paul.

In 1616, four years after its purchase, Rubens removed with his family to the new house, the alterations having been at length completed, so that it became at once residence, museum, studio, and, if we may say it, also shop. In all it was an almost palatial establishment.

In the larger lives of Rubens, notably that by M. Max Rooses, there are to be seen most interesting reproductions of drawings of various aspects of this fine house, both of its interior and exterior, as well as full descriptions of its various arrangements; and the reader cannot fail to be struck in particular with the extent of the studio and general business accommodation. The reason becomes apparent, as we learn his methods of work, and its extraordinary extent. The great pictures above-mentioned are a fraction of the sum of his output in this period. To these, and the next few succeeding years, belongs an almost incredible amount of work, until we realize the constitution of the Rubens studio. *The Last Communion of St. Francis*, *the Coup de Lance*, and *the Flagellation*, to name only the best-known, belong to this time; but besides these masterpieces, and indeed while they were under consideration, and actually in hand, a large number of works of minor artistic interest continued to leave the house on the Wapper,—portraits, landscapes, religious and mythological pieces, and, more important than these, a number of large series of decorative paintings, both religious or historical in subject. In short, up to the year 1625, the studio of Rubens was one miracle of activity, and in glancing over the principal works, taking note of the method of their execution, we shall at the same time obtain a realization of his manner of life throughout these important years of what is

Hanfstingl photo Lichtenstein Gallery

The Painter's Two Sons known as his second period,—his period of rest it has been called, but a rest that was at the same time one ceaseless activity.

Rubens was, with all his genius for art, a man of singular commercial capacity; in his own business, that of painter, he utilized and brought to a higher degree of perfection the apprentice system than probably any other artist, either before his day or since.

Apparently he had a dual idea of his function as an artist. Primarily, and certainly, he looked upon himself as a painter whose aim was to produce individual works of art, calling up for that purpose all that was hidden in the profoundest depths of his

nature, and expressing it upon his canvas with the aid of all means proper to the art. But secondarily, and, it is possible, with hardly full consciousness of the fact, Rubens looked upon himself as a great decorator, whose mission it was to restore to the impoverished Netherlands her ancient wealth of beauty and art. As an example of this, we find that on one occasion he pleads with the archduke for intervention between himself and the authorities of the cathedral church of Ghent, who were desirous of suspending the execution of a work definitely ordered from him for the embellishment of the high altar; and these are the considerations he puts forward: "It is not," so he writes to the archduke, "it is not so much a question of my particular interest, as of the adornment of the city."

Instances of the desire to repudiate bargains for his work were rare, however, for so great was his reputation from the moment of his return from Italy that commissions came crowding in upon him; and with his surging imagination in the realm of decorative effect, and his unflagging energy, he seems never to have refused any, however large the order might chance to be. But to execute them single-handed, his energy notwithstanding, was a physical impossibility. Soon, then, after the advent of the numerous pupils above mentioned, he began to discriminate among them, and according to their several capacities to employ them upon the subordinate parts of his own works, gradually training them up in his methods of applying and combining the pigments, until in their own special departments their touch became hardly distinguishable from his own. One pupil, for example, would always be employed in painting animals; another on any landscape that might be introduced into the picture; a third would paint the fruit and flowers, and so on; the finer and more expressive parts, together with of course the composition of the whole, being left for the master himself, though the exact proportion of his work in the painting would be a matter of arrangement at the time of undertaking the commission. For this co-operative method of picture production was prosecuted with the utmost frankness, a regular tariff being arranged, and intending patrons being given clearly to understand what they were to expect for the sum which they were prepared to expend; so much of Rubens own work, for so much cash; so much less cash, a proportionately greater amount of assistants work, down to the degree of having the design alone furnished by the master, the actual painting being entirely by other hands. In addition to his pupils, it became necessary at times to employ regular assistants also, men who had already acquired reputations of their own. Among these were the above-mentioned Jan Breughel and Snyders, Luc van

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Uden and Paul de Vos, while most noted of all, as both pupil and assistant, was Anthony van Dyck. Between this latter and his employer there was the most harmonious collaboration, the work which they did together making an almost perfect union. In the case of Snyders, it is said, that any animal painted by him was left untouched by Rubens; but as to the works done by Rubens and Breughel labouring in conjunction, one is led to think judging from the result, that the former must have undertaken them purely out of a spirit of love and good fellowship for the latter. No two methods of art could be more unlike, and a real harmony between them was impossible, a

fact that is obviously recognized by both men with frankness. One sees the Rubens figures, with their glistening flesh tints, flashing in the somewhat heavily-coloured and minutely-filled landscape of Breughel, with absolute wonder as to how the two ever dreamed of working together on the same canvas, except on the supposition that it gave opportunity for the mutual enjoyment of each others society.

As regards the other and less noted collaborators and the method of their working, we may gather some idea from the following story, which appears to be very characteristic of what has been termed "the House of Rubens and Co." It is recorded that a Last Supper had been ordered from the master by the authorities of the Cathedral church of Malines. To the dismay of the Dean, instead of the painter himself arriving on the day appointed, there appeared a young man named Justus von Egmont, bearing with him instructions to begin the work. To quote from Stevensons suggestive monograph on Rubens: "The Dean or Canon with some difficulty permitted the pupil to continue, but his fears were allayed when the great man appeared, with his fine calm presence and urbane manner that was a bulwark against offence and misappreciation. As Rubens corrected the work, enlivened the colour and the action of the figures, and swept the whole composition with his unerring brushwork towards a beautiful unity of effect, the churchman acknowledged the wisdom of the master, and admitted that the money of the chapter had been safely invested."

Rubens own testimony with regard to this system of collaboration is interesting, and may be gathered from his correspondence with Sir Dudley Carleton, the English ambassador, in 1618. This gentleman, having formed a collection of antique marbles, became anxious to effect an exchange of some of them for pictures by Rubens. The latter, being himself, as we are aware, a collector of antiques, on hearing of Sir Dudleys wish, communicated directly with him, and offered the ambassador a number of works that he had on hand at the moment. Of them he sent a list, from which the following is an extract:

"LIST OF PICTURES IN MY HOUSE.

FLORINS 500 A Prometheus bound on Mount Caucasus, with an eagle who gnaws his liver. Original by my hand, the eagle by Snyders. 600 Daniel amid many lions, painted from life, entirely by my hand. 600 Leopards, painted from life, with satyrs and nymphs. Original by my hand, except a very beautiful landscape, done by a very distinguished artist in that style. 500 A Crucifixion, life size, perhaps the best picture I have ever painted. 1200 The Last Judgement, begun by one of my pupils, after a picture of very large dimensions that I did for His Most

Serene Highness the Prince of Neuberg, who paid me 3,500

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FLORINS.

florins cash for it; the picture being unfinished, I could retouch it in such a way that it would pass for an original.

500 each. The Twelve Apostles and Christ, painted by my pupils after the originals by my hand in the possession of the Duke of Lerma; they would all be re-touched by my hand.

600 A picture of Achilles clothed as a woman, painted by my best pupil, and entirely re-touched by me. A charming work, and full of many beautiful young girls."

And so on; the list continues up to the total of a dozen, the description of each showing clearly the method of work obtaining in the great new studio in the house on the Wapper.

No other method would have made possible the amount of painting turned out in these years of Rubens second period.

Incidental mention was made above of certain series of paintings executed at this time. Of these between the years 1618 and 1625 there were painted no less than four. First, in 1618, the History of the Consul Decius Mus, which was represented in ten cartoons, painted so as to be reproduced in tapestry; this, a commission from certain merchants of Genoa. Second, in 1620, the decoration of the ceiling of the Jesuit church in Antwerp; fifty-six compositions were comprised in this scheme. Third, in 1622, he executed cartoons, again for tapestry, of the History of Constantine, in twelve compositions; this, an order from King Louis XIII of France. And, lastly, from 1622-1625, he was engaged over the better known series illustrating the history of Marie de Medici, the dowager Queen of France. In this last series are altogether twenty-one paintings representing historical scenes and three portraits. With reference to the Jesuit church series, we learn that the commission was for thirty-nine

pictures, to be completed in nine months, he to make the drawings on a small scale, the pupils, notably Van Dyck, to execute them in full size. The distribution of work was the same in the Emperor Constantine series; in the Decius Mus series Rubens painted the foreground figures himself, leaving the secondary figures and background to Van Dyck and other pupils. Thus we see how the pupils were trained and their capacities tested, until, being proved able artists themselves, they had laid upon them as time went on ever increasing responsibility. These four great series, however, are not the limit of the output from the Rubens studio at this time; several other important undertakings are still to be noted, the most celebrated being a remarkable group of paintings representing the Last Judgement and the Fall of the Rebel Angels, two subjects demanding somewhat similar treatment. The problems herein involved seem to have engaged his mind through the greater part of this period, the date of the actual paintings ranging from 1614 to 1620. These, undoubtedly inspired by works seen in Italy, were carried out in a spirit and manner entirely his own, and are among his most interesting creations-Yet another department of his industry must also be mentioned. In 1622 he brought out a book on the architecture of the palaces of Genoa, illustrated by seventy-two plates engraved from his own drawings, made when in Genoa, probably during that enforced visit, spoken of above, in the year 1607. It is interesting to read in the Preface Rubens motive in its publication. He hoped "to render a service to all countries this side the Alps," by introducing "to them a new style of domestic architecture in accordance with the principles of classic art."

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The (small) Last Judgement

Here we have incidentally another instance of that public spirit which so largely animated Rubens throughout his life, a genuine and integral part of his rich and complex character.

The mention of this book leads us to a notice of his large influence on the art of engraving in the Netherlands; not that he was himself an engraver, though possessing knowledge of the art, but he had continually, working in connection with him, a following of skilled engravers, who reproduced his pictures, or the drawings which he made for the illustration of various works published by the Plantin Press. These reproductions were always carefully scrutinized by him before they were finally published, while for engravings of his actual paintings he was accustomed to make a monochrome copy himself, to ensure a correct translation of tone from colour to black and white. The Antwerp school of engraving was in this way almost formed by the influence of Rubens, and it was also largely protected by his efforts; for through his various influential friends, Sir Dudley Carleton and others, he was enabled to obtain a copyright of his works in both Holland and France. His friend in the latter country was the eminent scholar and secretary of state, Peiresc, with whom he had a correspondence on matters of art and learning for many years, and it was through the influence of Peiresc that he was introduced to the notice of the dowager Queen Marie de Medici, when she was seeking among contemporary artists for one suited to decorate her new palace of the Luxembourg. In 1623 nine of the panels demanded by the decorative scheme of the queens palace were completed, and the painter left home, going himself with them to Paris in order that their installation in the gallery which they were to embellish might be carried out under his own eye. This decision of his to go personally to Paris had momentous consequences; it opened up the way to a gradual but complete change in the tenor of his life.

Up to now he had been painter first and foremost, in his aim in life and in the splendid reputation which he had built up. Antwerp, through him, was acquiring a new and more lasting glory than that of her ancient and now lost commerce. She had become the seat of a great and justly renowned School of Art, enriching herself and the surrounding provinces, and indeed the world, with her influence and her actual productions. Directly and indirectly the spirit of Rubens seems to have re-animated the whole city; painters, engravers, sculptors, architects, and scholars, all acting and re-acting upon each other, made together a grand swirl of intellectual activity, having practical results very apparent in the outward appearance of the town. Henceforward, for a period of twelve years, these productive labours, in so far as Rubens was concerned, were broken in upon and disturbed by others, no less arduous, but bearing much less lasting fruit.

Urged by motives as complex as was his own character, he entered gradually the field of international politics and diplomacy, and thus played so real and conspicuous a part that it is recorded, as the often expressed opinion of one of the great statesmen of the day, that he saw so many qualities shine in the artist that he believed his talent for painting to be the least of his gifts!

This period of political activity coincided with the third stage of his artistic development. From about the date 1625, though Rubens was already at the mature age of forty-six, his manner in art underwent a marked change, and that a distinct advance

in quality. It is equally clear that the change was the direct outcome of the work which had preceded it, and was in no way a consequence of new inspiration, drawn from new scenes and activities. It is therefore a matter of real regret from the point of view of art, that the immense vitality of the man, after his long-drawn-out period of growth, was not concentrated upon his art, instead of being dissipated in courts and journeys and delays, and the hundred and one distractions of diplomatic service, which, unfortunately, in fact absorbed more than half of his finest years of productive power.

CHAPTER IV

THE PERIOD OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN a monograph like the present, of which the aim is to give within strict limits some appreciation of Rubens as a great master of painting, it would be out of place to follow in any great detail his political career. Yet some digression from the main path of our study is necessary, since this career was an integral part of his life, and as such had some influence, if not upon the development, at any rate upon the distribution of his art, and as a further consequence affected the extent of his influence upon other painters and distant lands.

The northern provinces of the Low Countries had at this period successfully revolted from the Catholic power of Spain, and established themselves in the enjoyment of a personal and religious liberty at that time unparalleled in Europe. The "obedient" provinces of the south paid dearly for their submission: their trade was ruined by the closing of the Scheldt, Amsterdam superseding Antwerp as a great commercial centre; while their borders continued to be the battle-ground on which the ineffectual struggle was maintained between their masters and those who so recently had been their compatriots. The interval of the twelve years truce had been an inestimable boon, and all patriots, including the sagacious and noble-minded archdukes, Albert and Isa-

Hanfstaingphoto Brussels Gallery

THE INFANTA ISABELLA bella, desired to have the treaty renewed. Not so the sovereign of Spain, who found himself unable to accept the situation, and in consequence, at the end of the period of truce, commanded war, which meant for the hapless southern provinces a return of all the miseries and distresses from which they had just had the twelve years respite. It became thus the duty of all Flemish patriots to do the utmost that lay in their power to avert the calamity which their absentee over-lord had decided to bring upon them.

Rubens, one of the most prominent citizens in the state, connected with leading statesmen, and attached to the court itself, was inevitably drawn into the stream; and as early as 1623 we hear of his taking part in negotiations with the United Provinces, and being in the confidence of the archduchess. The archduke had unhappily died in 1621, and Isabella was left alone, and obliged single-handed to uphold the more enlightened policy of peace, in opposition to the blind determination of her nephew Philip IV of Spain. Happy would it have been if this triple struggle could have been maintained without further complications; but unfortunately the interests involved covered a wider area, no less than the whole of western Europe, where one country was played off against another, by this statesman and that, as it were in a grim and long-drawn-out game of skill.

France, desiring for reasons of her own the humiliation of Spain, and foreseeing it at the hands of the Dutch, was content that the war should be renewed, and even gave the Dutch substantial help. James and Charles of England, less sagacious than Cardinal Richelieu, wished on their part an alliance with Spain. Hence it became the policy of the Spanish rulers of Flanders to encourage the friendship of England with Spain, and to discourage any inclination towards an alliance with France, and at the same time to procure a peace with Holland. This broadly is the outline of the conflicting interests, to which should be added the fact that over and above the political issues at stake, there were also involved the differing religious principles and animosities of the time. England, Holland, and the French Huguenots being, on those grounds, in sympathy, and opposed to Catholic France, Spain, and the Netherlands.

When Rubens went with his nine finished canvases to Paris in 1623, he was already a political agent, and as a friend of Peiresc, only likely to tighten his grip on the complications of the moment. His position in the confidence of the Infanta Isabella strengthened as time went on,—in recognition of his public services he had been ennobled in 1624. So we find that when in 1625 he again visited Paris, primarily as artist, he was authorized to make and to receive state communications of considerable importance; coming on the same occasion into personal contact with the Duke of Buckingham and Gerbier, an active political agent in the interests of England, his field of knowledge extended, and he became prepared to undertake more direct and still weightier political missions. In this way we see him gradually drawn from point to point, as a patriot striving to secure peace for his country, as a loyal servant of his widowed sovereign, and also as a gifted man of affairs, conscious of his power, his opportunities, and his *savoir-faire*, allowing himself to be so drawn.

Doubtless another reason operated powerfully, and
Hanfstangl photo

The Hague Gallery ISABELLA BRANT made the long and toilsome journeys which he was soon about to take, more of a solace than a weariness.

Poor, impoverished Antwerp, notwithstanding her brave attempts to rehabilitate herself, held within her walls, doubtless bred of her very poverty, the seeds of still another wasting calamity. Once and again we hear of an outbreak of plague occurring in the city; and co-incidentally we find that Rubens removed for the time being to Brussels, thus combining caution and business. But alas! in the end his care proved unavailing; in 1626 at midsummer, it is surmised as a victim to the pest, his faithful and much-loved wife and comrade, Isabella Brant died, leaving her husband,—in the prime of his manhood, the height of his reputation, and the beginning of a new career of patriotic usefulness,—leaving him thus alone with two little motherless lads, Albert and Nicholas.

In writing to the French statesman Dupuy, one of his intimate friends, Rubens gives expression to his feelings under this blow. The letter is a self-revelation of more aspects of the writer's character and outlook upon things than he probably was at all aware at the time, and, as such, a quotation of some length from it will serve to enrich our picture of him: "Your lordship is right," he writes, "to remind me that I must submit to the destiny that yields not to our inclinations and passions, for it obeys the supreme Power and does not account to us for, nor reason with us about its actions. As

an absolute ruler it disposes of all things, and since we must needs obey it like slaves, we can only try by submission to make our dependence as honourable and endurable as possible. But this duty seems to me at present very trying and difficult. It is thus with great wisdom that your lordship exhorts me to rely on time, which will do for me what my reason ought to do, for I have no pretension of ever attaining an impassive stoicism. In my opinion no man can be wholly unmoved by the different impressions that events produce in him, or preserve one equal indifference towards all worldly matters. I believe on the contrary that it is right on certain occasions to blame such indifference rather than to praise it, and that the feelings which rise spontaneously in our hearts should not be condemned. In truth, I have lost an excellent companion, and one worthy of all affection, for she had none of the faults of her sex. Never displaying bitterness or weakness, her kindness and loyalty were perfect; and her rare qualities having made her beloved during her life, have caused her to be regretted by all after her death. Such a loss, it seems to me, ought to be deeply felt, and since the only remedy for all evils is the oblivion that time brings, I must undoubtedly look to time for consolation. But it will be very difficult for me to separate the grief caused by this bereavement from the memory of one whom I must respect and honour as long as I live. A journey might, perhaps, serve to take me away from the sight of the many objects which necessarily renew my grief, for she alone fills my henceforth empty house; she alone lies by my side on my desolate couch; whereas the new sights that a journey affords occupy the imagination and furnish no material for the regrets that are for ever springing up in ones heart. But I should travel in vain, for I shall have myself for companion everywhere."

To exalt his wife at the expense of her whole sex, though common enough under common conditions, seems curious in the observant son of Maria Pypelinx; it is, however, indicative of a very strongly marked characteristic of Rubens, and one to which we must refer later, when passing certain aspects of his art under review. But whatever the manner of its expression, there is no doubt as to the reality of his sorrow, nor that it served to push him still further into the stream of political life. The month following that of Isabellas death we hear of a diplomatic mission undertaken by him which necessitated a journey to Holland. It was on this occasion that he made the acquaintance of the young painter Sandraart, who, as already stated, was afterwards one of his earliest biographers. Indeed, for the next two years, i. e., to 1628, with the exception of a few portraits and designs for tapestry, and for frontispieces of books issued by the Plantin Press, there is comparatively small record of work done in his art.

Another event which seems to be logically connected with his wifes death, and one which it would be difficult to explain otherwise, is the sale of his so highly prized art collection to the Duke of Buckingham. Certainly the price received was high, namely, 100,000 florins, but Rubens was by this time a wealthy man, with a European reputation and clientele, and though an excellent man of business,—Sandraart observes that he "showed no less skill in the conduct of this affair than in the practice of his profession,"—yet we have no grounds for supposing that money, as money, had any attractions for him, or would ever tempt him in a matter where art was concerned. It is entirely more in character with what we know of the man, and, indeed, with his

own recorded words as cited above, that in his desolation and loneliness he preferred to have his house, as it were, despoiled of its treasures, rather than by the continued completeness of its setting be the more reminded of the loss of his chiefest jewel. That in effecting the sale he did not neglect to make a good bargain is only to say that it was Rubens who conducted the affair, the commercial instinct being as much his as was the artistic.

In 1628 he undertook a political mission to Spain, and on the day preceding his departure he characteristically concluded a formal settlement of all his private affairs. The Spanish negotiations were, as usual, long drawn out, and Rubens, installed for the time being in the king's palace, was given access to the royal collections, at that time under the care of Velazquez, the official painter to the court, though only twenty-nine years of age. The relations between these two illustrious artists were most cordial, and it was probably owing to the influence of the older man that Velazquez eventually took the artists pilgrimage to Italy.

The Spanish king had been at first loth to accept Rubens as an envoy on account of his low rank, but the Infanta Isabella, knowing his worth and loyalty, insisted, and the event proved her sagacity. The painter, by his tact and ability, was, when once on the spot, able to disarm the pride of even the King of Spain. Writing to his friend Dupuy, in December, 1628, Rubens describes the situation in a paragraph: "Here, as everywhere, I am busy painting; and I have already done an equestrian portrait of his majesty, who has expressed his approval and satisfaction. He shows excellent taste in painting, and has, it seems to me, very remarkable qualities. I can

Anderson's photo

P. P. RUBENS now judge him personally, for as I live in the palace he comes to see me nearly every day. I have also painted portraits of all the members of the royal family, who have kindly said to me, that I might carry out the orders of my mistress, her most serene highness the Infanta."

Month after month passed thus, and Rubens became heartily homesick for his family and friends left in Antwerp; some sort of consolation he may have found in the hope he entertained of returning home via Italy; but when at length the time came for his departure, so much had he gained the confidence of Philip IV that he was entrusted with special diplomatic business necessitating a quick return by way of Paris to the court of Brussels, and thence to England. Here, he was graciously received by the king, Charles I, and his remarks on this country are of interest. In a letter, again to Dupuy, dated August, 1629, he writes:

"The island in which I now am seems to me a place well worthy the curiosity of a man of taste, not only on account of the charm of the country, the beauty of the race, the outward appearance of luxury proper to a wealthy people happy in the enjoyment of peace, but also on account of the incredible number of excellent pictures, statues, and antique inscriptions possessed by the court."

Not until March of the following year, 1630, was he able to return home, so valued were his powers and knowledge of affairs by the respective courts interested. At length on March 3rd he took leave of the English king, who, in recognition of his services, conferred on him the honour of knighthood, which was confirmed by Philip IV at the special request of the Infanta Isabella.

As regards his art, one outcome of his visit to England was the commission to decorate the banqueting hall of Whitehall. The paintings were executed at his house in Antwerp, to measurements sent from London. In 1634 they were finished, but they were not forwarded until the following year, Rubens himself being unable to superintend their installation on account of an attack of gout. Apparently the now wearied diplomatist hardly regretted his inability to revisit England. Writing to a friend he expresses himself as follows: "As I loathe courts, I have deputed another to take my works, and according to my friends his majesty is well pleased. I have not yet received my money, a circumstance that would surprise me if I were a novice in such matters." In fact, it was not until two years later that the full price of the work was received by the artist. In the meantime a domestic event of great importance to Rubens personally had occurred, an event which, moreover, influenced his art in a remarkable degree.

It would seem that his friends had repeatedly counselled the lonely man to marry again, and in 1630, four years after the death of Isabella, he followed the advice given, and thus refers to the event in his correspondence with Peiresc: "Not being able," he writes, "to accept a life of celibacy, I have determined to marry again. I have then taken a young woman of honourable but middle class parentage, although everyone advised me to choose a court lady. But I feared above everything to find pride in my companion, that special blemish of the nobility—This is why I have chosen one who will not blush to see me handle a paint brush."

Helen Fourment, the wife chosen in this mercantile

Haiifstdno I photo

Rijks Museum, Amsterdam

HELENA FOURMENT fashion by the painter, now in his fifty-fourth year, was a young girl of sixteen years, esteemed remarkably beautiful by the circle in which she lived; that her husband admired her type of beauty no less is abundantly evident from the numberless portraits which he made of her and the even more numerous occasions in which she is arbitrarily introduced into other works, figuring in them as the beautiful woman of the piece, whether as nymph or goddess, madonna or saint. Poor child! one hopes that the perpetual offering of incense to her physical charms, with the renowned courtly manner of her elderly knight, served so to flatter, as to hide from her the real sentiments with which her husband regarded his union with her.—sentiments so frankly stated to his friend, and having, as we have seen, so little of the knightly about them.

The incense was offered by the painter to his wife honestly enough, and indeed the staid diplomatist, the experienced man of affairs became as it were intoxicated with the young loveliness which he had made his own. But the extent to which this beauty inspired and informed his art henceforward we must leave to be considered on a later page.

Drawn again as he was now towards his art, he was nevertheless not allowed to vacate at once the position in the political world which his abilities had won for him. True, commissions came in as ever, one from the Infanta herself, while sketches were made, and even some paintings in full size were begun, for a projected series in honour of Henry IV of France, to correspond with the de Medici series; but in 1631 he was

again singled out for diplomatic service by events which had the further effect of rendering his work for the Henry IV gallery abortive.

Marie de Medici, a centre of perpetual disturbance in her adoptive country, had been "detained" at Compiègne, but in July of this year she made her escape, and crossed the frontier into Flanders. A most unwished-for guest, it was nevertheless incumbent on the Infanta to treat her according to her position, that of the Queen-mother; and Rubens, associated with a nobleman of rank, was deputed to act as intermediary between Isabella and the royal fugitive. So again there began, for the painter, a period of anxious negotiation and ardent endeavour to preserve peace, in spite of the inflammable condition of affairs caused by the Queen-mothers action. A journey to Holland was necessitated by one crisis in the affair; but at length, after nearly eight months anxious employment, Rubens was allowed to return to Antwerp, his home, and his work. But the next year, 1632, he again received orders from the Infanta to undertake a mission to Holland, and on this occasion he received a great rebuff. The Duke of Aerschot, the Dutch official appointed to treat in the matter in hand, conceived a prejudice against the painter-diplomatist, and protested against his employment in the affair. The Infanta, however, as on other occasions, insisted, and accordingly Rubens went to Holland, and there, in a letter to the duke which he thought it necessary to write, gave occasion for this nobleman to proffer him such an insult as he had never experienced in the whole of his long and varied career of political activity. "I walk on a firm footing," the Infantas emissary had thought fit to write, "and beg you to believe that I shall always account satisfactorily for my actions."

Laurent photo

MARIE DE MEDICI

The Prado, Madrid

The duke, in terms only to be described as insolent, rebuked him for "presuming to write him a letter only permissible between persons of equal rank," instead of waiting upon him personally, and he concluded his epistle by saying: "It does not matter to me in the least on what footing you walk, or what account you can give of your actions; all I can tell you is that I shall be very glad if you will learn for the future how persons of your rank ought to write to those of mine." The insult was made the greater by the publication of the letter which contained it. Treatment such as this, coming from comparatively so insignificant a quarter, to one who was no diplomatic tyro, but a man accustomed to be accepted in the proudest courts of Europe, served to add disgust to the weariness which Rubens had now for a long time felt with regard to public life. The next year, the death of his so highly esteemed mistress the Infanta Isabella, acted as an additional reason for the decision he now made, that of withdrawing for the future from direct connection with the world of politics.

Inspired by his passion for his girl-wife Helena,—spoken of by Houbraken as "a new Helen," in respect of her beauty,—he turned to his art with fresh vigour, and painted in this enthusiasm a new group of works, an expression at once of his passion, and a glorification of his wives physical qualities. This group, however, by no means excluded work of a religious character; commissions from churches crowded in,—and strange enough, as it may appear, both classes of subject, the so-called "feasts of

the flesh " and devotional paintings, were alike executed with the same concentrated mastery.

Those works in which his special manner reaches its

utmost perfection belong to this period: and within the range of subjects treated, we have alike works of such contrasting sentiment and such absolute sincerity as *The Offering to Venus* and that most wonderful of all his creations, *The Ascent of Calvary*.

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CHAPTER V

HIS LAST YEARS

WE now come to the last stage of Rubens brilliant and successful career. The death of the Infanta closed a chapter in his personal history no less than in that of his country.

The following year, 1634, saw the entry into Flanders of the new Spanish governor, the Archduke Ferdinand. So enormous was the power resting in the hands of the individual governor that the event of his appointment was one of supreme importance to the unhappy provinces put into his power.

The new archduke was the only brother of the King of Spain, Philip IV. Destined for the Church he had been made a cardinal at the age of fourteen, but he felt no vocation for the life of an ecclesiastic, and eventually begged for a dispensation, as he was on the other hand very strongly drawn to a military career. His request was in the end granted, and his aunt, the Infanta Isabella, desiring in her old age to retire into the religious life, suggested that he should be associated with her in the government of Flanders. She, poor lady, however, died in harness, before her nephew arrived, and he, wishing first to flesh his sword before settling down to the labours of government and politics, delayed his coming for yet another year, while, in company with the King of Hungary, he fought for the Church against the reformed faith in the person of Duke Bernard of Weimar. In this expedition Ferdinand gained a brilliant victory, and shortly after this success he proceeded to take up the position awaiting him in the royal town of Brussels.

A week after his arrival he was begged by the burghers of Antwerp to visit their city. He consented, and forthwith the townspeople became engaged in the labour of designing decorations of such sort as to be worthy of the occasion, and at the same time to create a certain definite impression on the mind of the young governor. The problem was somewhat complicated; the city obviously must be beautified, and its loyalty placed beyond suspicion; withal the crying needs of the day must be made conspicuous, that of peace pre-eminently, and this must be done without any suggestion of discontent with the rulers who presumably favoured war.

Civic decoration was, as a matter of course, in that day looked upon as an occasion for art, and artists of first rank were employed on their design. Van Veen, as we remember, had had charge of affairs at the time of the last state entry of a new governor; and naturally now, as then, when so much depended on the character of the design, matters were put into the most capable hands available, these being those of Van Veen's most illustrious pupil, the unrivalled Peter Paul Rubens.

The archduke's entry was fixed for the middle of January, 1635, and already in December, 1634, Rubens writes to his friend Peiresc:

"I am so busy with preparations for the triumphal entry of the Cardinal-Infant (to take place a month hence) that I have no time either to live or to write. I even do wrong to the work by spending a few hours of the night in answering your delightful letter. The magistracy has put the whole conduct of the festivities on my shoulders. The decorations would please you, I think, by their variety and fertility of invention, novelties of composition, and propriety of application." Indeed, all Rubens special artistic qualities were brought into play; his invention, his grandiose ideas of decoration, his unfailing power of striking, if somewhat obvious, allegory, his classical learning, and his knowledge of architecture. So it came about that this business of civic decoration, instead of being a mere passing incident taking him from more serious labours, was in itself serious, and though ephemeral in its nature, yet for the moment of its existence a veritable, one may almost say a great, work of art. Owing to various political exigencies, the state entry was delayed from January to April, and in the interval the scheme grew under the hands of the artists employed. The amount of the original estimate of 36,000 florins was soon exceeded, the final cost of the whole reaching the immense sum of 78,000 florins. All the leading artists of the city were engaged upon the work, both sculptors and painters, carrying out the plans evolved by the leader of them all, Rubens. There were triumphal arches, "theatres" placed by the wayside, from which allegorical personages delivered allegorical discourses in choice Latin; and there was a magnificent portico celebrating the emperors of the House of Hapsburg. The whole route of the procession was one succession of brilliant effect, with the interest gathered up into special points at intervals, so that the archdukes attention might be judiciously arrested, his pride satisfied, and his com passion excited. The entire affair can hardly ever have been surpassed for magnificence and quality; nor, in proportion to its grandeur, could there have been a more pathetic picture of a peoples subjection and a rulers unconscious arrogance. It was the day of Rubens, and Rubens was of his day, and by his hand Antwerp triumphed gloriously in the light of that day. The archduke was pleased, and desired to express personally his appreciation of the artists efforts. But the protracted strain and overwork had told on even Rubens energetic frame, and the archducal messenger found him confined to his house by a severe attack of gout, aggravated by the excess of fatigue. The new governor, however, honoured him by a special visit the next day, to congratulate him on the success of his labours.

To preserve some memory of this great decorative work, the city ordered etchings of the general scheme and certain of the more important details to be executed by Van Shulden; from these, and some of Rubens own sketches, and the remains of a few of the paintings which were introduced into the architectural features, we may gather some idea of the magnificence of the artists conception.

The extremely high pressure at which Rubens had been obliged to live during the months of preparation for the state entry, added to the great expenditure of energy demanded by the long years of his political missions, told permanently upon his health, and he now determined to make such a definite change in the outward conditions of his life as to ensure greater quiet and ease in the future. In May, 1635, he purchased the manor of Steen, an estate situated in the open country, and com-

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pletely removed from civic interests and excitements. We may gather, perhaps, the best possible idea of his new surroundings, as well as the mood of his art at this time, by an examination of that superb landscape by his hand, now in the National Gallery, bearing the title of *Tie Chateau of Steen*.

This painting is only one of a numerous group of fine landscapes, in which Rubens displayed yet another phase of the originality of his genius. The newly purchased mansion was, as we may imagine, not considered complete without the addition of a commodious studio, where the master might employ himself in his art at will, and in addition to the landscape group referred to, a number of figure subjects also belong to this period. A further labour was again a large decorative scheme commissioned by the King of Spain for the embellishment of his hunting lodge, the *Torre de la Parada*, the subject being the *Metamorphoses of Ovid*. Much as Rubens must have loved this retirement, with such full opportunity for the work in which his heart was most engaged, he yet from time to time allowed himself to be torn away, as calls from Antwerp came for him to be present to give his counsel in the various political complications which continued to arise.

In the autumn of 1639 he left his country house to take up his residence in Antwerp for the winter. Persisting in his painting for the King of Spain, he was perpetually interrupted in his work by recurring attacks of gout, a now persistent enemy. He bravely kept it at bay as long as possible, and continued his labours, directing a staff of brilliant collaborators, so that the work might be brought to a conclusion as soon as possible. Feeling, however, as the new year advanced, that his forces were reaching their limit, with characteristic prudence and consideration he made a careful legal settlement of all his affairs. The advance of spring brought him no increase of strength, and on 30th May, 1640, the end came. In the sixty-fourth year of his age Peter Paul Rubens passed away, leaving behind him a brilliant reputation that will not pass away, both as a painter and as a man. "The Apelles of our age," says one admirer: "His art the least of his gifts," says another,—an antiphon of praise that succeeding generations are content still to accept and to re-echo.

PART II THE PAINTERS WORK

CHAPTER I

HIS FIRST PERIOD IN studying Rubens work we find that from first to last it was pre-eminently individual in character. It is true that in his early days he often borrowed forms and ideas, but even so he never reflected the atmosphere of any masters studio, nor ever turned out work that could for one moment be mistaken for that of another man.

He certainly j3wed much to masters and much to circumstances, but all that he gained from either, when re-expressed, came forth as it were a new combination; it

may be possible to recognize in it the component parts as borrowed, but as it stands it is a something quite unseen before.

Notwithstanding this strength of originality, showing itself from the very outset, the process of his development was very prolonged. Broadly speaking, his artistic course may be divided into the three periods already noticed in his life. The first extends to the years 1609-12, at which latter date he had arrived at the age of thirty-five. After this year a marked alteration is observable in his style, and his second period opens, which lasted until 1625. Then, as we have before had occasion to observe, when one would suppose his methods to be matured and his manner fixed, when middle age was fully reached, again another change, as great as the second one, is made,—a change which is also an advance,—and a further development into a richer and more masterly mode. His greatest, his most precious works, are to be found among those executed in his latest years; for his good fortune accompanying him to the end, he had no period of decadence following upon that of his full maturity; on the contrary, his eye and hand retained their vigour until the last stroke was drawn; his course from start to goal was one unchecked crescendo of power and achievement.

Having in the preceding pages passed under our view the main outlines of his life, we are now in a position to proceed to a more detailed examination of his work, without the interruption of continual reference to outside incident; our second part will thus be devoted to the consideration in turn of the three stages of Rubens' career, with reference to his art alone. Our appreciation will be illustrated by special reference to certain representative works, the greater number of which will be found reproduced in this volume. By narrowing in this fashion the field of our examination, it is hoped to create a truer impression of the painter and his (Euvre than could be obtained by a more extensive survey; the full number of Rubens' paintings being so enormous, any attempt at completeness of review within our present limits would inevitably resolve itself into a mere catalogue raisonné and the creator of the works himself be lost to us under the mountain of his own creations.

To begin then with his first stage, that lasting up to the year 1612, we find that despite its length this was throughout but one of apprenticeship and assimilation. Though, as we have already stated, never the reflection of any other man, yet in all these years Rubens can hardly be said to have realized himself. It becomes our business in consequence, when dealing with this period, to consider rather what were the materials which he assimilated, than to examine at too great length his own trial pieces and experiments.

Van Veen, we take it, was the first great influence on Rubens. Looked at from the modern standpoint this artist's work appears singularly uninteresting, "regular, null." It has neither the naïve charm of primitive sincerity, nor the splendour of complete mastery. Van Veen is to us a mere "Italianiser," but as such, over his contemporaries, he exercised a very potent sway. Under the influence of the great Cis-Alpine masters of composition, Van Veen introduced co-ordination of parts and restraint into his own work, marking the difference of planes, alike in the treatment of his figures and of colour; he painted in short with science and taste, lacking only inspiration. On the other hand, he possessed a fertile power of invention, was prolific as a designer, especially in the realm of allegory; he illustrated no fewer than four books of "

Emblems," one containing 103 plates, besides various other books having illustrations of a similar character. In these allegorical designs M. Rooses finds qualities superior to those exhibited in his paintings.

On the whole we must conclude that Otto Vaenius the "Italianiser" was one, who to such a pupil as Rubens, would prove infinitely suggestive, if not inspiring; and when it is added that he was a man of refined and generous nature, considerable culture and wide interests it becomes clear that the years spent in his house provided probably as good a training as could have been desired for a young painter who later was to pass on to Italy for a completion of his studies.

It is only in the light of what came after, however, that one speaks of Rubens as, at this time, still a student. In Antwerp, before the year 1600, he was reckoned already a qualified master, and accepted as a member of the Painters Guild, that of St. Luke. Further, we remember, it was the quality of the paintings that he had with him in Venice which recommended him to the notice of the Duke of Mantua, and determined that prince to attach him to his service.

Of the influence of Venice on the young man we have already spoken; it was one that never faded from his mind. Of all the Venetian masters Titian appears to have been the one who most commanded his admiration. We find throughout his career that he made numerous copies of Titian's works, both in Italy itself, and when on his missions to Spain he had access to the royal galleries, where Titian is so largely represented. But if Titian commanded his admiration, it was surely Tintoretto with whom he had the greatest affinity,—up to a certain point. The delicate poetry of Tintoretto was entirely outside the realm of Rubens' conception of things, but the Venetians' peculiar and characteristic treatment of colour, which rendered his paintings, apart from all question of subject, complete as colour dreams,—that triumph of the painter's art seems to have called forth an echo from the depth of Rubens' own artistic being, to be held however in abeyance until, the time being ripe, he could make his response worthily articulate. Many other problems were to engage his mind before that day arrived; but when at length it came,—in his third period,—when his faculties were brought into complete obedience to his will, then he returned to this idea, and the response he made was full indeed. Though at no time was his work more entirely his own than in those instances when his colouring was most triumphant, yet we are constrained to think that the peculiar fashion of his mastery was determined by the indelible impression he had received in his early years from the work of Tintoretto.

It is noteworthy that the earlier Italian masters left Rubens entirely unmoved; Bellini, Carpaccio, Cima, had no charms for him. Similarly in Florentine art, nothing previous to the full cinque-cento seems to have existed for him. /Andrea Mantegna even was apparently interesting only on account of the antiquarian quality in his work. When settled in Mantua, Giulio Romano, not Mantegna, was the dominating influence,—Giulio, the pupil of Raphael, and himself a master of Florentine decorative line. In the Palazzo del Te he had had a free hand, and room after room of its spacious suites was decorated according to his designs and largely by his hand. His work here is characterized by great breadth of treatment, his compositions are on a large scale, and his line is sweeping. The Chamber of the Giants is adorned by a decorative scheme which embraces walls and ceiling alike, without break, representing the fall of the

Titans before the thunder-bolts of Jove. Though to present taste this achievement may appear a nightmare of convulsive and colossal limbs writhing over the walls, it is an undoubted tour de force and evinces immense technical skill; and young Rubens seems ever to have bowed before mastery and brilliancy rather than poetry and delicacy.

In Rome he became acquainted with the work of Giulio's masters, Raphael and Michelangelo, and here again it was their rigidity and force which seem most to have appealed to him. He made many drawings after the latter, studies rather than copies, taking the older masters' subjects, giving them the same pose and the same drapery, only somehow re-expressing them in his own way, which formed the basis of Michelangelo. The form is reproduced but informed with another life. The art of antiquity, together with its history, was ever of boundless interest to Rubens, greater even than that evoked by the so lately deceased Italian masters; humanist as well as artist, the forms and symbols of Graeco-Roman art became for ever part and parcel of his stock-in-trade as decorator; we always find some classic element in his decorative schemes, demonstrating at once his love for these forms and his attitude as scholar-painter. The style which he gradually built up and made his own was consistently one in which scholarship was as evident as artistry. This was the intellectual position which he assumed among his fellows and maintained throughout his whole life. With the spirit of classic art, as we understand that spirit, he was far from being in touch; he revelled in his intimacy with both antique mythology and history, but when translated by him on to his canvas they became so turbulently Teutonic that no degree of accuracy in costume and faces, the most accurate caduceus, could prove an effectual disguise. In short, familiarity with classic art and literature may be said to have given him material and suggestion than to have influenced his stylistic craftsmanship.

The living school of painting at that time active in Rome had, on the contrary, a most marked effect on the future work of the young northerner, the pupil of Vannius, the student of Tintoret and Romano. In the fifty years or so which had intervened between the death of Michelangelo and the date under our consideration, viz. the first decade of the seventeenth century, the art world of Italy had continued to be busy, and, in its own estimation, to advance.

In Bologna had gathered the school of the Eclectics, counting the Carracci and Guido Reni among their number. These aimed at a certain academic perfection and distinction, by the attempt to draw together in their individual works all those different qualities which were recognized as highest in the works of the various masters who had just passed from the stage. The idea in pursuing this method being, that if, for example, the force of Michelangelo, the grace of Raphael, and the luminosity of the Venetians could all be combined in one canvas, the result must inevitably be superior to those works in which these qualities were to be seen separately.

In such a conception of art, creation was foredoomed, and in the early years of the seventeenth century painters were again turning to nature, and prosecuting a direct study of her methods. The most strenuous of these students was Michelangelo Caravaggio; of him M. Rooses writes: "Instead of following masters or a school and seeking perfection in academic beauty, he devoted himself to the study of nature, and applied, himself, to an exact rendering of nature. Subjects drawn from every-

day life did not seem to him to be unworthy of his pencil, and when he sought for inspiration from the Bible he gave the preference to scenes of grief and suffering. In his maturity he sought to make his figures stand out by painting them against a very dark background. He preferred truth and the vigour of life, strong emotions and striking contrasts of light and shade, and vividness and pathos of subject, to the timidity and insipidity of the contemporary academic school." Following Caravaggio came the school of the *Tenebrosi*. Guercino and Salvator Rosa and others,—in themselves not of commanding interest,—but together with their leader they served to open up a fresh pathway for artistic development, that of *chiaroscuro*. This question had certainly occupied the attention of painters before the days of Caravaggio, but it had not been made a dominating feature in the work of the older masters, and light rather than dark had claimed their chief attention. The almost black backgrounds of Caravaggio gave the required hint of the possibilities which shadow also possesses for artistic treatment, and from him, by way of one or two intermediate steps, the art of *chiaroscuro*, of light and dark together, was built up, until the climax was attained by the unrivalled clembrandt van-Rhyn. Into this group of workers Rubens was introduced during his first visit to Rome, and assimilated much of their teaching. Their more familiar attitude with regard to nature was quite in harmony with his own strongly Flemish temperament: they did not hesitate to depict the painful, sometimes even the ugly, so it were true. To this conception of what was fitting in art Rubens own judgement would give entire assent. Except in rare instances when he rose above his normal self, and for the nonce ranged himself among the gods, Rubens was extraordinarily callous in matters of taste, as regards the incident or the sentiment which he would accept as fitting for artistic expression. He could and did make a picture of almost anything, and went far to justify his action by the glamour which he was able to throw over the ugliest themes by means of the *co Qvgechiaroscuro* and decorative quality of which Tie came to "be such a sovereign master.

Yet one other personality made his impression on the young Rubens during his Roman visits. Adam Elsheimer, a German, born in Frankfort in 1578, thus Rubens junior by but one year, was at this time resident in Rome. The problems of *chiaroscuro* attracted him also, and he had a particular predilection for nocturnes, in which he represented the interplay of moon and star-light, and contrasted them with the ruddy glow of torch or fire. He was an etcher, too, of some distinction, and it is supposed aroused Rubens interest in black and white reproduction, an interest which resulted later in the work of the latter in connection with the Antwerp school of engraving.

The three altar-pieces which Rubens painted during this first visit to Rome were the work of the last three months of his sojourn. They are interesting as demonstrating how he was beginning to feel his way among these new ideas and materials towards a method of expression that should be entirely his own. The Elevation of the Cross has a further interest as being the first treatment of an idea which took its final form in the great Elevation Triptych of Antwerp Cathedral. We have already in this earlier work the pale figure of the Christ in sharp contrast to the dark background, in its turn filled with vigorous limbs and strained attitudes. We have yet to wait for the further mastery which will blend the two, and, while preserving both extremes, will make a harmonious unity of the entire composition. Rubens first journey to Spain seems to

have been of little or no value from the point of view of art, and, as before remarked, to have served merely as a further experience of life in courts and the world. t

His second and longer visit to Rome gave evidence that in the intervening time spent in Mantua he had gained in skill of hand and in power of vision. The painting of St. Gregory for the Chiesa Nuova is a striking advance on the three altar-pieces for Santa Croce di Gerusalemme; Rubens himself reckoned it his most successful work up to that time. The figure of the principal saint is entirely Rubenesque, and we see in the treatment of chiaroscuro a feeling after a richer effect than that attained by Caravaggio; violent contrasts are there, but within the profundities of the shadow there is a glimmering of life, and in that is the promise of advance, even in their own domain, on the work of the whole school of the Tenebrosi. This canvas of the St. Gregory, being left on the painters hands, was carried with him on his return to Antwerp, where he placed it as an offering of filial affection over the altar of the Holy Sacrament in the Abbey Church of St. Michael, near to his mothers tomb. It is now preserved in the Museum of Grenoble. The painting finally accepted by the fathers of the Chiesa Nuova was practically a new composition, and may still be seen in its original position in the church.

The important paintings, enumerated both in this and in the preceding chapters, dealing with this period do not by any means complete the full tale of Rubens work while in Italy. In addition to those named he painted a number of mythological subjects, all having, under cover of the myth, some allegorical meaning. Throughout his life, from time to time, he returned to painting of this kind; one may even in these works trace to some extent the trend of his mental growth and development, in noting the class of subject which he was in turn drawn to treat in this allegorical fashion. In these earlier days he enjoyed generous dreams of the ideal in manhood, and in this mood painted two pictures for the Duke of Mantua, both having for subject the Hero; in the one case, under the form of a drunken Hercules supported by fauns, he allegorizes the Heros fall, overcome by base passion; in the other painting, The Hero Crowned, he depicts the Vanquisher over vice. Other paintings there were of this period representing Satyrs and Fauns feasting and drinking, these symbolizing in their impersonal forms the joy of life, and, as before, Rubens appreciation and enjoyment of scholarship and ancient art. Later we shall find him using the same forms to express a different and much more sombre idea.

The total number of works already executed, and the wide range of their subject, had quite established his reputation among his contemporaries as an accomplished master, when he again crossed the Alps and arrived once more at home in Antwerp. This mastery he summed up in the great triptych of the Elevation of the Cross, and with it brought his first period, with its characteristic manner, to a close.

Stevenson, in his monograph on Rubens, sums up the characteristics of this stage as follows: "The first or Italian manner was heroic and bold in principle generally, hard in style, violent in chiaroscuro, and yet at times tamely academic in drawing. Its culmination is the triptych Erection of the Cross." We will then proceed to an examination of this painting in some detail, noting specially its most salient qualities.

In its three panels we have three separate scenes of the great event; in the centre the actual raising of the cross, on to which the Victim is already nailed; it is being

hauled and pushed into place by nine muscular men, in every possible attitude of strain and exertion. The left hand wing contains two groups, in strong and interesting contrast to each other: one consists of the daughters of Jerusalem weeping with their children; the other group, standing behind on a higher level, consists of Mary the mother and St. John. In the right wing we have the mounted centurion, and behind him the two malefactors being bound to their respective crosses. This incident, as is so often remarked, is probably borrowed directly from Tintoretto's great Crucifixion in the Scuola di San Rocco, as is also the introduction of taut ropes used in dragging the central cross into its place. Beyond these two incidental ideas it is difficult to see the influence of the great Venetian in this particular triptych. Great as was the debt which Rubens owed to Tintoretto, the influence of the latter was, as we think, at this time strictly in abeyance; the borrowing of an incidental detail from him can hardly be spoken of as working under his influence, though it does indicate that the memory of Tintoretto's work was still fresh in Rubens' mind. These details of the thieves being bound, and the hauling by ropes, remained in his memory, and he used them; but for the rest, the whole sentiment and treatment of the work is, with all its mastery, worlds apart from Tintoretto's subtle poetry and suggestion. The scale of colour over the whole work is very dark and brown, relieved by some few touches of clear red, blue, and white; *chiaroscuro*, rather than colour, has been the painter's chief preoccupation in applying his pigment.

It must be admitted that in the centre group there is a certain confusion of legs and arms among the straining executioners; one cannot but feel that the energy displayed is more than the occasion demands, yet each figure taken separately is finely studied and heroic in pose and action, while considered together, as a group, the very struggle, and confusion serve as a foil to the pale figure of the Christ, drawn "athwart the canvas." He, in sublimed contrast to the executioners, is quiescent, not as dying, but because his spirit is out of and beyond the pain, the body remaining as but the outward symbol of the spiritual triumph. It is not often that Rubens rises to high poetic expression, and the occasions when he does so are generally when his subject is the Christ, and at those moments when in physical weakness He triumphs over strength. This deep under-current of feeling is curiously interesting in this most robust of painters, who so revelled in the glory of the physical, the magnificent, the rhetorical; yet again and again we find this inner conviction returned to, down to the very end of his busy and most strenuously lived career. In the left-hand panel, the group of weeping women is artificial and academic; there is no note of life and conviction about them, posed with grief almost grimacing on their tearful faces; it is in striking contrast to these that we find Mary and John standing behind, in attitudes of unquestionable dignity, and represented with originality and sympathy. John's black and furred robe overlaps Mary's almost equally dark blue one, the sombreness of the two darks being broken by her clasped hands, on which John lays one of his,—an arrangement exquisite in art as in sentiment. The right hand wing is largely taken up with the figure of the centurion and his horse, in a manner that became highly characteristic of the painter, and whose love for horses was shown by his introductions of them into his paintings on all occasions where it was possible and fitting, and in this case the horse is of great decorative value and serves to give proper balance to the composition.

Passing the principal parts of this work under review we find how completely it displays those qualities which belong particularly to the first period, merits and defects alike, yet despite all that we may find of the latter the work remains a masterpiece. a virile conrpphnn nf a traditional subject which, under this young mans hand, is made to live again, as it were a new thing. Had Rubens ended here, he must even so have been reckoned a great and undoubted master. At this point, however, his course was but in its first stage, and passing from the Elevation to the Descent we have opening before us a fresh period of continuously increasing interest and power

CHAPTER II

THE SECOND PERIOD

AS an introduction to our examination of Rubens JT. second period, with its characteristic manner, we shall find a continuation of our quotation from Mr. Stevenson of service:

"This second manner," he writes, "is much more original; it started the Antwerp School, and beyond its ideal scarcely any contemporary advanced. The forms are less muscular, the gestures less exaggerated, the transitions suaver, the light and shade less contrasted than in the former period, but the pigment is still solid, and the colours are treated as large unfused blocks of decorative

All that Mr. Stevenson observes as generally characteristic of the period we find in the Descent from the Cross; the transition from one manner to another was sharp and sudden. The treatment of this second great triptych is chastened throughout, as befits the subject. The energy expended in action is kept in proportion to what is required; there is no undue straining and display of muscles for their own sake. The subject itself has absorbed the painter, and he has subordinated all his forces to its expression, in the highest terms of which he was capable, with the result that perhaps nowhere else in art is there a more pathetic representation of the scene. Again, we see, it is a moment when the paradox of triumphant weakness has appealed to him, and the dead Christ gleams forth from the surrounding depth of shadow as the " perfect Hero, tried in heaviest plight." The wings of the triptych, though beautiful, are not of such commanding interest as the centre, and probably this was done designedly. The Visitation has a quaint realistic charm, being obviously inspired by his young wife Isabella. She, in wide-brimmed Flemish hat, has just mounted some steps towards the door of Elizabeths house, where the latter stands giving her a motherly welcome; cocks and hens pick up corn in the foreground, a familiar touch, adding to the impression that the entire conception is but an affectionate transcript from real life, entirely charming, but, as compared with the central panel, a drop from the heroic to genre.

Other examples representative of this second manner are the Adoration of the Magi and the Miraculous Draught of Fishes, both at Malines, The Last Judgement and Battle of the Amazons, at Munich, the Miracles of St. Francis Xavier and of St. Ignatius, at Vienna, The Wolf Hunt, in Lord Ashburtons collection in England, and, most notable of all, The Last Communion of St. Francis, in Antwerp Museum. This last, together with the Coup de Lance, also in Antwerp Museum, shows signs of his approach towards the third and last manner.

While enumerating the above paintings as representative of the period which we have for the moment under review, the greater number of them must also be re-

classified from another standpoint, viz., as items in various groups of works, each group animated by some specific idea, of interest to the painter, or expressive of some mood which possessed him for a given time.

A noteworthy fact with regard to Rubens work is that throughout his whole life we find it falling into well-defined groups, as the procession of his ideas moved in their order across the stage of his consciousness. Never was he at any one time enthralled by one idea alone, but, on the contrary, the constant custom of his mind was to entertain two or more exacting problems simultaneously. It is even recorded, that at one period, he regularly employed a reader in his studio, to read to him from classical authors while he himself was in the very act of painting. It was owing to this mental habit that these various groups were not mutually exclusive; each held that part of his mind that it demanded for its expression, without jostling or intruding upon any other idea which in its turn was occupying its own appropriate place in the same mind. Both were alike served by the painters best energy, though they might be poles apart in sentiment and essential qualities. This power of separating himself into many men at one and the same time grew with exercise, the greatest multiplicity of labours belonging to his latest years.

This being Rubens characteristic method of working, we shall find that, while adhering in the main to a chronological arrangement of his painting, it will be from time to time convenient to examine it in its groups and trace a series in its development, apart from all the crowd of other themes which were being worked out, concurrently, in the painters mind.

The Adoration of the Magi, at Malines, mentioned above, is one of a group of nine paintings, each a separate treatment of the same subject; the first of the series, as already stated, being painted for the Town Hall of Antwerp in 1610, and is now to be found in Madrid; the last was not painted till 1632, and is that which at present is in the possession of the Duke of Westminster. The group thus spreads over a period of twenty-two years, and includes work in each of his three manners. In the first he established his position as the leading painter of Antwerp, and its style is that which he brought with him direct from Italy. The painting at Malines is held by critics as finely representative of his second stage; while that in Antwerp Museum, painted in 1624, a magnificent tour de force, is taken as the first great example of his last and most perfect style. All the nine are a grand demonstration of his versatility and unfailing power of invention; each one differs from the rest in some fashion or another. Sometimes the accessories bulk largely in the canvas, sometimes the figures entirely predominate; these, again, vary greatly in number, from the small group of persons actually essential to the story, up to a great attendant crowd of soldiers and slaves, with horses and camels; in the case of the example now at Lyons a great dog is introduced, who barks at the intruding kings. The fact of this constantly varied method of treatment, and the manner of the variations, leads one to feel that it is not so much the subject, as such, which has occupied the painters mind, as that the episode offered him an opportunity for executing a great ceremonial and decorative composition, in which all manner of artistic problems might be worked out; each painting is such in effect, a triumphant solution of some question, be it of chiaroscuro, of composition, of tones and values, or of

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

Brussels Gallery the application of pigment, and with his success in these special points are infused so many other excellencies, without which it would be impossible for him to wield the brush at all, that each Adoration is in its turn a masterpiece.

The Brussels Adoration (1615) is perhaps a clearer realization of the scene in its historic aspect than most of its fellows. The procession of kings, with their attendants, sweeps down from the top of the canvas to the centre bottom, every face in the crowd individual and living. The three kings are magnificent representations of their respective types, the salient characteristics of age and race being finely realized; the contrast between the king of middle age, and the Ethiopian is most happily marked; the one, fine intellectual European character, crosses his hands upon his breast, his reverence and adoration being appropriately expressed by his very silence and self-control. The negro, on his part, puts his hands together like a child in prayer, while his lips part, showing the gleam of his white teeth, as he hardly restrains audible expression to the ecstasy of his devotion. The chiaroscuro is as beautifully broken as it is graded. The highest point of light is the principal figure of the central group, the Holy Babe Himself. Outside the stable we have but the fading light of the evening sky, mingled with the glare of torches. In the entire picture there is much and brilliant colour, red characteristically predominating, while a refreshing touch of clear green in the young negro's cloak, to the extreme left, gives an element of lightness that is charming, and is in delicious contrast to the deepest shadow of the composition, in front of which the youth stands. Another point to be noted in the Brussels Adoration is the yellow robe of the kneeling king,—a brilliant example of the treatment of texture.

In the Descent from the Cross, painted in the previous year, the drapery serves but as an occasion for line and colour,—texture, as such, has not been considered. In the king's robe we find this question has been most carefully studied, and throughout this entire painting the drapery has received particularly careful handling, is strictly anatomic in treatment, while beautifully free in line.

The Malines Adoration is a further development of the idea as stated in the Brussels painting. It is, perhaps, darker in general tone, but the composition is strongly reminiscent of the earlier work. Again the square of canvas is traversed by a semicircular sweeping line, into which the entering procession falls, and again at the bottom towards the centre is the highest light, illuminating Mother and Child; the kings, as before, have arrived towards evening, and are shown up against the gleam of the setting sun behind them, while we have in contrast to this the ruddy light of the torches, which is reflected in the faces of the crowd, and they gleam out of the shadow in this partial and reddened light. The peculiar excellencies of the Malines Adoration are dwelt on by M. Fromentin, in the invaluable interpretation of Rubens he offers in his *Les Maitres d'autrefois*. "Observe," he says of this picture, "the manner in which everything moves, breathes, looks, acts, is coloured, fades away, harmonizes and contrasts with the setting, dies away in the light tones, establishes and asserts its meaning by vigorous touches. And as to the intermingling of tones, the extreme richness obtained by simple means, the violence of certain tints the softness of others the lavish use of red, and yet the freshness of the whole, as to the laws I say which govern such efforts, these are things which baffle the mind."

Here we must for the moment break into the consideration of the Adoration group, and return to it on a later page, always remembering that the next of the series, while characteristic of its own period, is also to be looked on in connection with its predecessors of earlier days.

The Miraculous Draught of Fishes, at Malines, in the church of Notre Dame, painted almost immediately after the Adoration of the same town, strikes an altogether different note, though in its own way it is of almost equal interest. In the latter we have the decorative ceremonial painter giving a courtly presentation of a regal scene; in the Miraculous Draught we see the careful student of things as they are, of wild mirky weather, rocking fishing boats, glistening gaping fish, rough fishermen, such as he must have seen any day of his life at their work on the banks of the Scheldt. The one unreal, unbreathing figure in the picture, is that of the Christ, who stands in conventional textureless draperies, which the howling wind scarcely ruffles,—a curiously academic figure, from which all life is eliminated.

As a composition the work has that decorative quality which is inseparable from any conception of Rubens, but throughout all his characteristic flow of line and dash of attack there is also to be perceived the mood of the realist and the keen observer of nature in her most literal aspect.

The reason suggested by M. Emile Michel for this realism indicates anew the richness and adaptability of the artists powers. The commission for the painting was given by the working fishermen of Malines to decorate the altar of their Guild in the church of Notre Dame. A picture for fishermen ought obviously to appeal directly to them, and that it should do so was the task Rubens set himself to achieve. Such then as were the Malines fishermen would he depict those others who afterwards became the Fishers of Men, and in pursuance of this idea he pictures for them their own life, with its toils and successes, its storms and exertions, only glorified by the manner of the treatment. The Malines fishermen must have felt their picture to be in a peculiar sense their own, and that through its lordly presentation of the scene their own daily labour was for ever afterwards ennobled in their eyes. We cannot fail to render homage to the wide range of the masters powers when studying these two works at Malines, which demonstrate at once the keenness of his vision and the fertility of his invention.

To this period belongs another group of paintings, equally characteristic of the working of Rubens mind as, in its own way, was the series of Adoration pictures. In striking contrast, however, to these latter are the Processions of Silenus. Classic mythology had, as we know, a constant attraction for Rubens; in its treatment his scholarship had play, and he was able to demonstrate his position to his fellows as humanist and "Romanist"; further, the subjects being universally familiar to scholars, and indeed to all persons with any pretensions to culture, they lent themselves freely to allegory, a mode of expression in which the painter delighted, and one that was moreover in general favour at that date. The Processions O i-i a

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of Silenus are allegories; as his earlier paintings of nymphs and fauns symbolized his sense of the joy of sunshine and life, as seen in the vine-growing land of Italy, where yet drunkenness is rare,—so these later Processions are said to indicate his sense

of repulsion, aroused by the coarser and more obvious vice of his compatriots. The idea of these paintings was in its inception classic, the elements of the composition being taken from sculptures preserved in the Roman museums. But under the hand of Rubens they became transformed, in the literal sense of the word. Silenus and Faun, negro and goat, may all be on the ancient marbles, represented as intoxicated or joyous, and seen there we share in their irresponsible gaiety without any sense of repugnance. But the Silenus and Faun of Rubens are gross and hideous, while the female forms introduced are entirely detestable, without any mitigation.

The influence of the Roman artists, whose studios he had frequented, may in part account for the peculiarly repellent quality Rubens chose to infuse into this series of works. These painters did not shrink from a certain amount of distinct ugliness while pursuing their search for reality, and Rubens but perseveres along the same path, going however to greater lengths. Be this as it may, it is interesting to compare his work as a moralist with that of his contemporary and fellow-student under Van Noort, J. Jordaens. In the Brussels Museum is a painting by this latter, entitled, *Le Roi boit*, a biting satire on the sycophant vice of that, or indeed of any day.

A semi-inebriated monarch sits at the head of his table and drinks; around the board are seated courtiers,

men and women, one of whom holds a child upon her knee; the company shows every stage of intoxication, indicated without any reserve on the part of the robust painter; as a climax to the servile imitation of the court, behind the royal chair stands even a monk, asses ears however pierce his cowl; he, with the rest, raises aloft a brimming bowl. The moral is pointed, scathing, and unmistakable; we have shown to us a real crowned king, and real people, debased and vicious.

It may be that Rubens thought such unmodified Hogarthian directness over-coarse and unbefitting a scholar-painter, who was likewise a courtier and a gentleman, and therefore as a more excellent way than that of the plain man Jordaens, adopted the less direct method. of allegory, in which, under the guise of non-human forms, he felt himself at liberty to say the last word possible of ugliness and debasement, and so convey his disgust and reprobation.

In any case these pictures remain as surely the most hideous creations in art, as regards the conception of degraded form; at the same time they are painted "by his hand," and possess the consequent and inevitable distinction. "*Lidee est grossiere,*" writes M. Max Rooses, "*mais l'execution est splendide.*"

Four paintings comprise the Silenus group; three were executed between the years 1615 and 1620, the fourth in 1627. They are interesting, apart from the splendour of their execution, as indicating a phase of the painters thought, and also as illustrating to some extent his manner of treating classical subjects. His other paintings inspired by ancient mythology are too numerous to mention, and impossible to group; he continued through-

out his whole career to turn them out annually from his studio on the Wapper, in varying numbers; some fine examples of his style, others less so, in proportion to the amount of work "by his hand" which was put into them. Many, it must always be remembered, of those attributed to him by museum catalogues, are largely if not principally the work of pupils and assistants.

Again, in startling contrast to the Processions of Silenus, demonstrating still further the immense range of the painter's gifts, and representing yet another mood and order of problem set and solved, is *The Flight into Egypt*, painted in 1614, and now in the gallery at Cassel.

A more exquisitely tender and entirely beautiful picture it would be difficult to find in the work of any painter. Perhaps in that of Rembrandt alone could be discovered one fit in any way to compare with it. It is biographically interesting as very evidently suggested by the work of Adam Elsheimer, who had treated the same subject, and also as a nocturne.

The beauty of the Madonna is surprising in a work of Rubens; she is of a unique type in his whole work, belonging neither to the Brant nor Fourment family. The light emanating from the Child, whom His mother clasps, in her arms, illumines her lovely face, the neck of the ass, and St. Joseph, and two angels, who, unseen by the fugitives, have constituted themselves their guides. Apart from this supernatural light, the road along which they pass is in deepest shadow, cast by trees. St. Joseph turns apprehensively to scan the way they have already traversed; this, in contrast, is bathed in a soft moonlight ineffably delicate and fine in effect. "Rubens," writes

M. Rooses, "a fait de ce tableau un vrai bijou, un fine et exquise miniature."

The *Venus warming herself* (Antwerp Museum) and *The Old Woman warming herself* (Dresden Gallery) are other examples of works under the Elsheimer influence, but none have the many sweet beauties displayed by the *Flight into Egypt*.

We now turn to a group of greater importance, namely, that dealing with the Last Judgement. In these Rubens challenged comparison with the giants of Italy, Michelangelo and Tintoretto. They had respectively stated a problem to which the courageous Fleming conceived, as he thought, another and a better solution. Accordingly, after his manner, he executed a group of paintings, all varying treatments of the subject. We have three Last Judgements, two representations of the Fall of the Damned, and one of the Assumption of the Blessed, six in all; in the opinion of M. Rooses, all but two painted between the years 1615 and 1618.

Before he left Italy he had made some tentative experiments in the expression of this theme, and then laid it aside, possibly feeling that he lacked the experience to do either himself or the subject justice. In the possession of far greater mastery he returned to it a second time, and exerted all the powers at his command in its interpretation. The so-called Large Last Judgement was executed before April 28th, 1618; having been commissioned by Wolfgang Wilhelm, the Duke of Neubourg, for a newly-erected Jesuit Church in his Duchy. The Duke was a convert to Catholicism, and, full of fresh zeal, gave the Flemish artist numerous orders for paintings of sacred subjects, and proved himself at the same time that unusual thing among contemporary princes, a generous paymaster. For the Last Judgement alone he paid 3,500 florins, though its intrinsic value was much diminished by its having been unfortunately, to a large extent, executed by assistants. We have in it, of course, Rubens' conception of the theme, and his composition, the swirling avalanche of human forms, falling before the fiat of irresistible might; but the distinctive Rubens quality of execution, that which justifies even his most flagrant lapses from good taste and propriety is lacking. Another treatment of the same scene, known as the Small Last Judgement,

together with the larger Fall of the Damned, are, however, by his hand entirely, and of the latter M. Rooses writes: "It is a terrifying conception on a more titanesque scale than that of any other artist, be he Michel Angelo, Dante, or Milton. It is a transposing of the human drama beyond and above actuality. The picture is, moreover, splendid in drawing and colour. The mixture of lights and darks, both natural and supernatural, reflecting on the bodies of men and animals is rendered in masterly fashion." The same writers praise of the Small Last Judgement is scarcely less enthusiastic. Lord Ashburtons Wolf Hunt is an example of yet another group of this period, consisting of a series of hunting scenes; of these there are no less than fifteen, twelve of which date between the years 1615 and 1620. We have in the number, lion hunts and tiger hunts, the hunting of wolves and boars, and in one instance the chase of crocodiles and a hippopotamus. All are struggles between men and animals to the death, of the latter certainly, of the former possibly. There is obviously in such subjects full opportunity for the exercise of the painters delight in action and strain, and play of force and muscle. That which arouses adverse criticism in the Elevation of the Cross is here entirely legitimate, indeed is demanded of the subject; the painter has found an appropriate field for the exercise of these special powers, and the satisfaction of his mood. Animal life had always a great attraction for him, and he was, in particular, a lover of horses and dogs,—both are introduced into his pictures whenever possible; the more savage forms of wild beasts had also, we see, their fascination for him. These, thrown together in such circumstances as to show their utmost of power and movement, with men in addition, in every conceivable attitude and gesture expressive of intensity of endeavour, all go to make up the prime material of the Hunts, while some have the still further interest of a landscape background.

In the Lion Hunt, now in the Munich Gallery, we have the finest treatment of that special species of sport. In one fine group of interlacing struggling forms, we have depicted seven men, three horses, a lion and a lioness. The absolute mastery over all the possibilities of line which these forms can give is superb, and the reduction of all this variety into the unity of composition is equally admirable. Nor are the qualities of colour and chiaroscuro forgotten in the skilful manipulation of line. The work is a magnificent demonstration of Rubens peculiar powers within the limits defined by his subject. The series generally show also very strikingly his studio method of production, for the execution of these Hunts was left largely to pupils and assistants. The drawing and composition having presented the problems in which Rubens was himself specially interested, the staff was

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Jw called upon to do the painting, the final unity of effect being secured by finishing touches more or less numerous, applied by the master as occasion demanded. The suggestion of these pieces was probably taken from similar scenes, in sculpture, on the antique sarcophagi studied in Rome; in some cases the style of the composition, as in the instance of the Munich Lion Hunt is obviously reminiscent of sculpture,—the originality of the work lies in their translation from sculpture into painting.

The landscape found in some of the Hunts leads us to the consideration of yet another class of subject which also occupied him to a certain extent during the years under review, this is landscape proper.

Landscape had for long held a conspicuous place in Flemish Art. The first purely religious inspiration of the Van Eycks and Memling had died with Quentin Massys in 1530; but within Massys's lifetime there had arisen the beginning of another school. With the earlier masters there had been a distinct interest in landscape, and it came to be the generally chosen background of their paintings filled with numerous minute subsidiary interests, in what might be called a garrulous manner. This habit of crowding their canvases with irrelevant detail called forth in one of the reported conversations of Michel Angelo, that masters strong reprobation. Prejudicial as the manner undoubtedly was to grandeur of style, it nevertheless indicated the lines along which a later school of artists might develop, and with Joachim de Patinir and Herri de Bles we find the new way entered upon. In these masters' works, the background so increased in interest as almost to overpower the ostensible subject of the painting. John in the Wilderness and the Holy Family resting during the flight into Egypt appear as tiny figures or groups, reduced to mere points of value among others, in a widespread and fantastic panorama, embracing all the elements of landscape. The Fantastic is the keynote of these scenes, they are not so much studies of nature as of composition, for which nature is consulted to yield material or suggestion. For a time, this idea of utilizing instead of studying nature, seems to have held the field, of course in varying degrees, according to the temperament and even the passing mood of the painter. Jan Breughel, to name no other, gives us examples of the most fanciful treatment, and again at other times, that Nature which he has turned to consult has asserted herself so potently that he was fain to take suggestion as command, and embody it as the main interest of his picture. This Breughel, as we have noted above, sometimes collaborated with Rubens: the Earthly Paradise now in the Mauritshuis in the Hague is their joint work. Rubens having painted the Adam and Eve, Breughel the landscape. Other painters we know were employed by Rubens to fill in the landscapes of his own pictures, but there were occasions when the busy master chose to do his own landscape, and even to make it the principal interest of his piece.

To the years at present under consideration belong quite a number of works that must be classed as landscape proper. At a later date he again returned to this field of study, and did work of immense value, but these later works are a group apart, to be examined in their turn, masterpieces in an altogether different category from this smaller group, executed in his earlier years.

The so-called Prodigal Son may serve as an example of this earlier effort: at one time in England, it is now in the Antwerp Museum. Notwithstanding its name, the picture is primarily a familiar study of farm-buildings and landscape and contrasting lights. The landscape to the right of the picture is seen in the early morning light, just immediately preceding sunrise, the rosy glow of which is visible upon the horizon. To the left one sees within a wooden stable, horses, cows, and men busy attending to their wants; a candle in a sconce attached to the wall illumines a corner which the daylight has not as yet reached, and the opportunity is thus given for a play of lights and ruddy reflections upon the brown woodwork of the building. As immediate foreground, is a woman feeding pigs, and beside her kneels the half-clad prodigal. He, together with the woman and the pigs, is only sketched in, as though the painter were justifying

to himself the expenditure of so much pains on a mere study of farm-buildings and broken lights.

Later in life he realized that no such justification was required, but that the interpretation of a landscape was in itself amply sufficient for the exercise of even his great powers. Passing from these various groups which spread more or less over the whole of Rubens second period, and, as we have seen, were to so large an extent the fruit of his co-operative method of production, we must now consider two individual paintings of great importance, each in its own way a characteristic masterpiece.

The Last Communion of St. Francis was painted in 1619, and is unique in the whole wide realm of Rubens art. In its conception and execution the master seems to have stepped outside of what we are wont to consider his proper sphere. Accustomed to the unparalleled exuberance displayed in all his other work, at first sight one is tempted almost to doubt whether the St. Francis be in truth painted by Rubens hand or not, and if it be a veritable conception of his so turbulently active brain. But Rubens work it incontestably is, and we must of necessity rearrange our estimate of his multiplex character so as to realize that even the St. Francis is its natural outcome. It is said that Domenichino's Communion of St. Jerome suggested the general composition of the picture,—yet so marvellous and unexpected is the treatment accorded to the subject that originality remains one of its prime characteristics. We have in Rubens work, the moment chosen, when almost in the death agony, St. Francis rises from his couch of ashes on the church floor, where divested of his frock, he was awaiting his release, and as a last act, is about to receive the holy wafer from the hand of an officiating brother. As in the Descent from the Cross, the pale spiritualized naked figure is the centre of interest; everything in the entire picture leads up to, or proceeds from that point. The deep brown shadow in which the extreme right of the picture is enveloped, gradually lightens in a downward curve towards this central point, and transformed to light the line sweeps upwards, brightening the priests embroidered cope, the red curtain above, and so, up to the blue sky without the high window, and on to the rose-tinted bodies of a group of descending cherubs. The dark-robed brethren,—each in himself a careful study of profound grief,—in their capacity as a part of the composition, preserve an element of animation within the gloom of the right hand, as does the priest in his turn on the left; the vital point, where life, as it were, visibly quivers in its intensity is, para-

Antwerp Gallery

THE LAST COMMUNION OF ST. FRANCIS doxically the dying Francis, who by sheer force of will is retaining hold upon his body, so that it may obey him once more, in this supreme act of love, and earthly worship. Instinctively he touches the wound on his own side, indicative of his sense of unity with Christ, and pressing forward he uses unconsciously to himself, but as his own, the strength of his brothers supporting arms, so that he almost rises off his knees, in order to advance towards the celebrant.

It is indeed strange to find in Rubens, of all painters, the capacity to paint such a work as this; that he, the big blond, full-blooded lusty man, should be from time to time translated from his world of mastery and success, into that other, where divinity is seen in weakness, when the outer body has sunk to the place of a mere symbol, its

proper forces outworn by the spiritual within. This, the moment of painting the St. Francis, is one of these rare occasions, and among the greatest, when the seer and the poet awoke within him, and guided his brain to a great conception and his hand to its powerful expression.

M. Fromentin closes his criticism of this work as follows: "Quand on a longuement examine cette œuvre sans pareille ou Rubens se transfigure, on ne peut plus regarder rien, ni personne, ni les autres, ni Rubens lui-même; il faut pour aujourd'hui quitter le Musée."

For the same church in Antwerp as that for which the St. Francis was painted another work was commissioned the following year: this was the celebrated Coup de Lance or the Christ between Thieves. On this occasion the painter was as violent and realistic as in the St. Francis he was restrained and spiritual; truly in the latter he had "transfigured himself."

The Christ between Thieves is a powerful presentation of an execution by crucifixion, aggravated by the still greater torture of breaking the victims legs. One of the thieves, convulsed by the agony, tears his foot away from the confining nail. It is hard calmly to criticise artistic qualities when they are employed in such brutal fashion; yet they are there in large measure, despite a certain lack of unity in the composition and the presence of sensationalism in the groups of spectators. Biographically the painting is interesting in that, like the St. Francis, it exhibits signs of the coming change of manner which was marked and complete after but five more years. Into this space was crowded an immensity of work, enough to tax to the utmost the resources of both the indefatigable master and his whole staff and studio. The five years output includes the chief of his great decorative series, notably those for the Queen of France, Marie de Medici. We have before noted the part borne by his assistants in the execution of these series; to Rubens himself they must have served principally as practice, though on an immense scale, in composition and invention, at the same time they were magnificent opportunities of revel in the antique forms and mythological allusions which he rated so highly. But yet in another and most unsuspected direction these gigantic undertakings made their impression on Rubens; the very devolution of so much of their execution on to the staff, in itself led to the full development of the third manner. On this point Mr. Stevenson is again a luminous exponent. "The third manner," he writes, "becomes evident chiefly by use of higher keys of colour, shadows less marked, less heavy, less black and brown, of a thinner lay in, of pigment generally less dense, of tints more aerial, more fused and broken; of a touch slippery, expressive, and far more dexterous than that of the earlier periods. I think the change partly grew from the constant working over his pupils paintings which Rubens practised during the execution of the five large series of decorations which almost overlap each other from 1618 to 1623. He could not help thinking much of processes, of the economy of time, and brush work, of the use and quality of under-painting, of the value and importance of a few marked finishing touches; you may think, when he had brought the solid heavy style of the second period to such perfection of process that it could be applied almost mechanically by his pupils to translate his sketches, Rubens would get sick of it, as a method of working, for himself, and that using the experience he had acquired on the Luxembourg series, he would paint one or two large pictures entirely

with his own hand, as experiments in a new style. Such are two canvases chosen by Max Rooses as marking the beginning of the third manner, namely, *The Adoration of the Magi* (Antwerp and *The Assumption of the Vtrgm Knt eff Cathedral*). But belbre passing onto the consideration of these works belonging to the third manner, we must complete as far as our space allows, the survey of the second, by pausing a while over these great series of decorations.

Of the Decius Mus series we give an example in our illustrations to show the general style. The subject was classic, giving full opportunity for introducing all the decorative "properties" so industriously culled from the Italian collections of antiquities; it was further a motive lending itself to the display of movement, force, and energy, and capable of rich decorative treatment in its general composition, as well as in its accessories. The works were, however, cartoons merely, to be executed in tapestry, and as such limited in the scope they offered for painting. Approximately, the same may be said also with regard to the Constantine series.

Of the decoration of the Jesuit church, as already stated, little enough can have been by his own hand, the designs only of the individual panels and the general scheme being all that can be certainly attributed to him. Moreover, such as it was, doubtless splendid in effect, it has perished by fire, and we can only gather an impression of the lost grandeur from the few sketches and drawings which remain.

The Medici series is thus the principal example. It has been carefully preserved, may be seen in its entirety, under exceptionally admirable conditions, there being now a special gallery in the Louvre set apart for its exhibition, and further, the series is not one of cartoons merely, but of paintings in the full sense of the word, and the finest examples we have of his purely decorative work. Of course it must be recognized that the assistants had a great deal to do with even these panels, but presumably very much less than in the case of the Jesuit church; indeed, the impress of the master spirit of the great studio is very deep on every aspect of the Luxembourg series. Each panel is a tour de force, characteristic in its every line of that force which was peculiarly Rubens own.

As we pass these paintings under our review, and in so doing build up our estimate of them, and of Rubens as their creator, there are two important facts which we must bear well in mind. First, the subject was in itself a most unpromising field for heroic treatment. Marie de Medici was the antithesis of the heroic; the actual events of her life were commonplace to the pitch of meanness. She was born and educated, she was married for purely political reasons to the elderly Henry IV, the ceremony being performed by proxy in Florence, and again on her arrival in France. There was neither mutual love nor even respect in the union, neither giving the other cause for the growth of either sentiment; Marie quarrelled with her husband, who insulted her in his turn; she quarrelled again with her son, but on this occasion a reconciliation was eventually effected. This was the poor material on which the artist had to work and exercise his tact no less than his invention. Out of it how build anything of a noble decorative character, or introduce a regal quality? Yet such was the task which Rubens was commissioned to undertake.

The second fact to be remembered with regard to this work, and one insisted upon at some length on an earlier page, is Rubens training as a courtier, and his complete

acceptance of the renaissance courtier ideal. In the passage already quoted from his letter to Dupuy on the event of his wife's death, there is a clear light thrown upon his attitude of mind as regards the monarch *per se*: "The Supreme Power does not account to us nor reason with us about its actions: as an absolute, ruler it disposes all things, and since we must needs obey it like slaves, we can only try by submission to make our dependence as honourable and endurable as possible." The divinity of kings could hardly be more distinctly implied. It was the prevailing idea of his day, and of all persons living in that day, Rubens was the last to step outside or go beyond its limitations; he degraded it, but remained unquestioningly within its bounds.

Marie de Medici then, be she, do she what she might as a woman, was nevertheless a queen, and as such, a translation of her acts into a language differing from the common speech was her due. The events not being in themselves picturesque but the chief actor being royal, a way suggested itself to meet the difficulty. With one sweep of his inventive faculty Rubens removed them, one and all, from their mean reality into the realm of allegory, and dressed their insignificance in the garb of mythological presentation; so doing, he was at once enabled to give his imagination and his powers of composition full scope: by calling in all the gods and elements, the fates and the furies to deck his canvas, he produced what we see, a tour de force, a grand decoration, heroic in character and yet representing the facts of the Queen-Mothers biography.

In spite of the amount of assistants' work, which as regards execution, gives the general effect of Rubens with the life withdrawn, there are wonderful pieces of painting here and there, more especially in one and another salient point where the nude is introduced, and in these cases probably it is Rubens' own touch which we recognize. The chiaroscuro is somewhat heavy, probably this also is due to the preponderance of helpers' work, as also the heaviness given by the so frequent use of a solid red in great unbroken masses. This peculiar red, a colour seldom absent from Rubens' palette, is often a prime source of his successes, as it appears and reappears, in o 1—

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robe or ruddy light, reflected, or glowing, as the case may be, extending his colour scheme, refined and blended in his own peculiar fashion. But when used in solid blocks, it is too often, as on this occasion, a note that jars on the general harmony of the painting. With regard to composition, these panels exhibit in large measure the painter's characteristic mastery, though, perhaps, here and there their high decorative quality is somewhat lowered by an over facility of line and a certain lack of repose. But taking into consideration all the circumstances and requirements connected with their production, the Medici series serves indubitably to enhance their creators' reputation, and to demonstrate his right to rank among the master decorators of the renaissance.

CHAPTER III

THE THIRD PERIOD

THE third manner shows itself firmly established in the two paintings already mentioned, *The Magi of the Antwerp Museum*, and *The Assumption of the Virgin in Antwerp Cathedral*. The former is in striking contrast to other treatments of the same subject. A totally different aim has been before the painter, and a problem which was almost the reverse of what he laboured on in previous presentations of the same scene.

To this also must be applied the term *tour de force*. The swirl of inventive energy with which he had swept into their places the elements of the Medici compositions had apparently not subsided; only he turned from their artificial imaginings to an old friend, and one on which his best powers might fitly be exercised to their fullest extent. It is said that the painting, as it stands, was the work of thirteen days!

Hitherto we have seen him usher in the Three Kings with a long procession of attendants, the hour has been towards evening, and we have had elaborate schemes of chiaroscuro, gleams and reflections, depths and heights, and these have lent themselves as much as even the figures to the building up of the composition. In this instance we have everything laid out on a totally different plan. The figures are compactly arranged in a pyramidal group, each one blending in with that established mass line. There are no spaces left to be occupied by gloom, or shaft of light, but the figures themselves take up the space of the canvas in a fashion almost sculptural. One overlaps the other in perfect relief, and this despite the fact that there is no deep shadow anywhere to throw one up before the other. The entire picture is in a half-light, but so perfectly is this limited scale of chiaroscuro managed that each one of the manifold grades within it, however delicate, is clearly and perfectly distinguished. The old king to the left seems, among the figures, to be the least studied in the composition; his pose is artificial and his voluminous drapery very heavy, but this latter is probably due to the haste with which the work was concluded. It is the only strong colour in the picture, and is the heavy solid red alluded to above. In the rest, a scale from blue to green, and from green to blue, is played throughout, thrown up by an undertone of browns with this is also a charming interplay of white, which preserves the whole from heaviness, while small touches of red give further notes of colour interest. Throughout, the clearness of the colours, even where the shadow is at its deepest, preserves a glowing ensemble. It is a painter's problem set and solved, a demonstration of craftsmanship and knowledge, and, in proportion to one's own knowledge of painting will be the thoroughness of one's admiration. The painter's point of view from which to regard it, for though the old devotional subject of the Epiphany, it is not a religious picture, it does not touch the heart in any way, nor arouse a pious emotion. The extraordinary expression of the Ethiopian king alone precludes any feeling of devotion; the great figure of the negro is a striking presentation, but not that of a devotee. This picture is in a marked degree a triumphant work of art in its own realm, that of pure painting, and that, in truth, was probably all that Rubens intended it to be. M. Rooses' criticism on it is valuable: "In it," he writes, "he inaugurates the blond luminous manner that remained his own henceforward to the end. it constitutes his definitive doctrine. he never again lapsed into opaque tones, or harsh transitions in colours and values. but. (maintained) a deep rich transparency even in his strongest shadows."

The Assumption is on somewhat different lines, and, we may remember, was painted under peculiar circumstances. Begun when Isabella Brant was seized by her fatal illness, it was completed in the first desolate weeks succeeding her demise. We have the good fortune to find it occupying the place for which it was originally painted, over the high altar of the cathedral. The altar itself was in the first instance erected from Rubens' designs, but this was sold in 1798 by the agents of the Convention Nationale, and the painting itself transported to Paris, a fate which befell so many of the Flemish

works of art. In 1815 it was returned to Antwerp, and a new and sumptuous setting of marble columns and architrave was erected to receive it. As to the composition of *The Assumption* the traditional elements are naturally present, but with numberless small variations on the theme which give it a rich originality, within the limits of the old inspiration. The colour is deliciously clear and radiant, with which the little rosy cherubs are charmingly in harmony, and in the swirl of whose movement, together

GASPAR GERVATIUS

Antwerp Gallery with that of the Virgins own drapery, there rings as it were a paean of triumph, into which the group below is drawn by the lines of the upraised hands of the apostle to the left. In the dress of this latter we have the familiar red introduced, but even that is in this case mellowed into a beautiful tint, harmonizing with the rest.

To a date not long after that of the two works just considered belongs a remarkable portrait, now in the Antwerp Museum, that of the painters intimate friend Caspar Gervatius. This Gervatius was a scholar, secretary to the city of Antwerp, and through him Rubens had obtained the valuable introduction to Peiresc which led to such great results in his career. Portraiture, as is well known, engaged our artists attention all through his life, and it is impossible to arrange his works of this class into groups; we can only note that with all his other claims to greatness, he also takes first rank among Renaissance portraitists, and from the crowd of portraits by his hand we may select as typical one or two for special consideration.

In this connection a paragraph from one of the numerous notices which appeared after the death of the great German portrait painter Von Lenbach is of interest, it is as follows: " Lenbach relates that when he felt himself becoming unduly influenced by Boecklin he took refuge in Rubens, who, although possessed of more fantasy than Boecklin, laid all his magic aside when painting a portrait, and absorbed himself completely in the individual, employing only the very simplest methods. As an example of portraiture Lenbach cites the portrait of a young nobleman in the Lichtenstein in Vienna, and calls this one of Rubens occasional poems, in contrast to the fantastic orgies of his large works."

The portrait of Gervatius may be instanced as another of these " occasional poems," in which Rubens has effaced himself, restrained his " swaggering brush" in order to realize his subject. He has indeed made an extremely delicate and searching study, and created a living monument of his friend.

Gervatius is represented in a black dress, presumably that of his profession, with white cuffs and ruffle, his figure filling the centre of the canvas. The scheme of the chiaroscuro is an ascending scale from a deep transparent shadow in the right-hand bottom corner to the diagonally opposite left-hand top corner. From this point the light falls directly on the face of the sitter, that of a refined and delicate student; he is seated with quill in hand, just raised from the act of writing on the white pages of the book before him, and in the pause he has turned and is looking out of the picture. On the table behind his book is a marble bust of Marcus Aurelius, his favourite author; this, together with the paper and the pen, catches and holds the light and presents the requisite contrast to the shadow behind. The methods are simple indeed, but the portraiture perfect, the chief power of the artist being focussed upon the most characteristic points, the face and the hands, which are exquisitely painted.

So, looking at this portrait, one realizes how even Lenbach found in Peter Paul his master.

In the Antwerp Museum is another painting which though ostensibly a subject picture, is actually in all pro- 1 Anita McMahon in "Nineteenth Century Magazine."

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THE "CHATEAU DE FOIL"

bability a portrait group. The Education of Mary is a beautiful work of the realistic order. St. Anne, an elderly woman habited with a certain richness, is resting on a marble seat in the corner of her garden; St. Joachim leans over the carved end of the chair, and both are looking with parental solicitude on the youthful Mary, who, dressed in a lovely silk of the contemporary cut, raises her eyes for the moment from the book which rests upon her mothers knee, while two little descending cherubs hold a wreath of flowers over her unconscious head. Excepting this rather arbitrarily introduced suggestion of the supernatural, the painting is but an idealized scene of happy bourgeois domesticity, and of this a very charming picture. It becomes additionally interesting when the idea is mooted that the features of the two elders are those of the painters father and mother, while the little Mary is undoubtedly a portrait of Helena Fourment at an early age. There is an Antwerp tradition to this effect, and M. Rooses is inclined to accept it as worthy of credence. Portraits of Helena Fourment, when his wife, are numerous, as are also paintings of Isabella Brant, and of his children, while all served repeatedly as models in other works. Susan Fourment, his sister-in-law, was another favourite model, one portrait of her, in her own person, is the celebrated Chapeau de Foil, now in the National Gallery; this is one of the most important canvases in his extensive gallery of portraits.

To this class of painting Rubens seems ever to have turned in all the pauses of his life; when in enforced inaction, waiting as courtier on the various princes with whom he conducted negotiations, and unable on that account to initiate, or to carry out the great schemes of decoration of which his brain was the unfailing source, he took his brush, and, for the time being, solaced himself with creating the portrait of whatever sitter came to hand. Sometimes this happened to be a member of the court, or a person of real distinction and historical interest, but often enough we have what can only be designated in the modern catalogue as "Portrait of a Man," "of a Youth," "of a Lady"; and work, it may be, of the finest quality is found in the portraiture of some person quite unknown. In the whole tale of Rubens portraits we have examples of each great period, and almost every stage of his development from youth to his latest years; the complete number of them, given by M. Rooses as one hundred and sixty-five, forms no unimportant section of his lifes work.

Notwithstanding the interruptions caused by his political activity, the Infanta Isabella obtained from her painter a series of designs for tapestry; he painted the sketches with his own hand, and afterwards superintended their execution in full size by his pupils. This work was spread over two years; or rather, begun in 1625, it was not finished until 1627, this alone showing how little was the time Rubens could give to his studio, and how much was perforce spent elsewhere.

The Infanta, whom duty to the State alone held from formally embracing the religious life after the death of her husband, desired to give these tapestries to the

Convent of Barefoot Royal Ladies in Madrid, a community belonging to the order of Poor Clairs. The subject chosen was the Triumph of the Holy Sacrament, to illustrate which Rubens designed thirteen cartoons, as follows: The Triumph of the Holy Sacrament over Paganism; its Tri- -Q

. H pq D umph over earthly Wisdom, Science and Nature; its Triumph over Ignorance and Blindness; its Triumph over Heresy, the Triumph of Divine Love in the Holy Sacrament; then following these five Triumphs came four symbolic events: Abraham offering bread and winetomelchise-dek; the Israelites gathering manna in the Wilderness; the Sacrifice of the Ancient Law; the Prophet Elijah fed by the Angel; and lastly came four compositions representing the confessors and defenders of the dogma of the Holy Sacrament, the Four Evangelists, the Fathers of the Church, and other Saints, the Popes who have confirmed the dogma, and ecclesiastical authorities and princes of the house of Austria adoring the Holy Sacrament. A complete list of these compositions is of interest as indicating the scope and quality of Rubens invention and allegory.

The tapestry workers of Brussels, who executed these designs for the Infanta, received many further commissions from other quarters for replicas of the same compositions; but their popularity is shown even more by the demand for their reproduction by engraving. Some of the masterpieces of the Rubens school of engraving are plates made from these designs, more particularly those executed by the engravers, Schelte a Bolswert and Nicolas Lauwers.

The projected further decorations for the Luxembourg, ordered by Marie de Medici, to illustrate the history of Henry IV, engaged Rubens attention through the years 1628-30. On January 2/th, 1628, he wrote to Dupuy: " I have begun the sketches for the other gallery, which, thanks to the quality of the subjects, will be in my opinion more magnificent than the first: so that I hope to show progress rather than any falling off." Unfortunately the project, begun with such high hopes, was never brought to a conclusion; court obstructions and intrigues caused much delay, and finally the exile of the Queen-Mother put a complete stop to the work, which was left in all stages of incompleteness on the painters hands. In the catalogue of his works, made after his death, the following note occurs: "Six large unfinished pictures containing sieges of towns, battles and triumphs of Henry IV, king of France, which were begun some years ago for the Queen-Mother of France." Of these, two large pictures remain, both now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, one of The Battle of Ivry, the other the Triumphant Entry of Henry IV into Paris. A number of sketches for the series are extant, three in the Wallace Collection, others in various European galleries, public and private. The two paintings in the Uffizi, only one of which can be considered as at all a finished work, indicate that the master had certainly made progress, and had surpassed the earlier Medici panels in treatment, as well as in conception. Unfortunately both these works are so ill placed in the Niobe Gallery that it is well-nigh impossible to gauge fully their worth and quality. The Henry IV series remains as one of the most noteworthy and regrettable among the many might-have-beens in the history of art.

Of the decoration of the Banqueting Hall of Whitehall, which also belongs to this period, little can be said. Such has been the action of Londons smoke and fog that Rooses speaks of them as being at the present time but " tristes debris de la decoration."

As regards their subject, the glorification of James I, he further remarks with a certain humour: " In the history of Marie de Medici I find a strange photo Vietma Gallerv

LE PELISSE and in that of Henry IV allegorical figures are mixed with those of real personages. In the history of James I reality has given place to symbol. One may say that the less the action of his hero interested him, the more he calls imagination to his aid, and that those of James I have appeared to him so insignificant that instead of regarding them he has translated them into poetry."

We come now to the period when Helena Fourment was to be so largely the painter's inspiration. We have in consequence for our consideration paintings widely different in character from any belonging to previous years. Of the numerous portraits of the beautiful Helena we have already spoken, one of the earliest of these is that known as *The Pelisse*. Helena is represented as coming from the bath, with but a black furred robe drawn around her. As M. Rooses justly remarks: " It suffices to compare this portrait of Helena d la pelisse with that of Isabella Brant seated by the side of her husband under the honeysuckle arbour, to understand in what respects the second marriage of Rubens differed from the first." Isabella had been a comrade, Helena was a mere intoxication, and in addition, to quote the outspoken contemporary, Houbraken. " she was a valuable possession for the artist, since she spared him the expense of other models."

Rubens sentiments regarding, and relations with, Helena Fourment, as frankly stated in writing, as indicated in his paintings, give us an insight into the nature of a certain strain which, tingeing his whole character, pervades, in like proportion, all his art. This refers to his Constitutional attitude towards women; which, as was natural, reacted upon his artistic treatment of feminine form, the quality of which treatment is as marked and individual a feature in his work as any other one of its constituents.

The word " strain " is perhaps hardly so just a one as " lack," for when we review Rubens works one by one, bearing in mind his manner of thought and life, it becomes increasingly apparent that it is a negative rather than a positive quality with which we have to deal in this connection.

We are accustomed to hear reiterated remark on the coarseness of Rubens female types, and to have it variously attributed to his Flemish taste, his vulgar mind, and what not, and in truth every gallery in Europe gives ocular demonstration of his repeated delineation of low and ugly female forms, at times touching even the point of revolting degradation. We have only to refer to the *Silenus Processions* for glaring instances in point. These works, on which he chose to expend his utmost mastery, seem, indeed, to indicate, on his part a certain positive depravity in taste, a deliberate calling of evil good, and of ugliness beauty. A comprehensive study of the whole man, however, in all his relations, seems to reveal another possibility and to bring some harmony into the apparent discord. Peter Paul, we must remember, was a sincerely religious man, his reputation for probity and virtue was honestly earned, his life was open as the day, and had no discreditable byways or mysteries. He was in all relations of life an honourable man, and a gentleman, and yet there is this all-pervading semblance of a degraded taste, and that often in works by which he has best expressed himself.

It is a truism to say that the finest human types either I . S
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of man or woman, are those which entertain, and reverence, an ideal of the complementary sex, and which in addition to the virtues proper to their own, develop some of those specially characteristic of the other. To cite the tritest of all examples,—we admire a man who is tender as well as strong,—a woman who is strong as well as tender. T

Rubens seems to show himself a man of singular onesided development, of an almost abnormal masculinity; the cosmic balance of the masculine and feminine was not reacting to him either consciously or unconsciously, as a creative necessity.

One can conceive, in illustration, his reading the Divine Comedy, and eagerly charging his intellect with its philosophy, its science, theology, and history, its construction, and its many poetic details, and yet rising from his studies with but the vaguest impression respecting Beatrice. Writ short, though he was a perfect courtier, "Ilgjvas no knight. His character lacked the element of high romance; he had no dream princess in his youth, there is absolutely nothing of a boys knight-errantry recorded of his early years, nor did any fancied discovery of his ideal woman disturb the even tenor of his way, in all the cities of Italy or of Spain. This fact is not surprising if we realize that his imagination held no ideal for him to recognize. In this, he was of course far from being unique, but the lack is rare in the constitution of a really great creative artist. Isabella Brant, when she came into his world was counted as "an excellent companion," her very excellences causing him some surprise; while as regards his second marriage, the physical beauty of his bride, and his own pleasure and convenience were the sole considerations that counted in the matter.

Having no ideal standard of a woman in herself, it is not surprising that an ideal of woman's outward form eluded his imagination. What did appeal to him, as a man, was the opulence of feminine form, softness of texture, lustre of surface, delicacy of colour. These delighted his senses, and these he painted,—without reserve, i —and they were all the beauties that he recognized in a woman. He could paint a man as a very Apollo, and ". did so more often than once, but a veritable goddess, / J? never; even his Madonnas were but variations on either Isabella or Helena. Such figures then as we find in the Silenus Processions, were no shock to his sense of propriety, where there is no ideal there can be no degrading. He wished to depict as forcibly as possible the hideousness of vice, instinctively he stayed his hand when picturing the principal character, his standard of manhood being lofty, and Silenus himself is represented only as deplorably inebriated, the fauns even are no more; his sharpest note of ugliness and depravity he as instinctively puts into woman's form, and it occasions no distress, for it offends no interior canon, and offers insult to nothing in his universe.

This lack, demonstrated most flagrantly in pictures of the Silenus order, is that which passing like a trail over all his work gives it that peculiar quality which calls forth such frequent expressions of reprobation. It is, however, not the result of a deliberate contemning of the feminine, nor positive preference for base or clumsy form, nor any vicious poison at work: it is but an obtuseness in one region of his constitution, in itself a negation which how-

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ever, works out positively when expressed in formative art.

Helena Fourment became his "valuable possession," and arousing in him a passionate admiration, was made use of as model and object of study, without reserve, in a way and to a degree that astounds. He proffered her, consciously, as we have seen, no indignity by this usage. She was at hand, and beautiful; why not take advantage of the kindly gift with which the gods had blessed him? He was no philosopher, as we may judge from the few paintings in which he has attempted to express some abstract thought, the result being almost ludicrously crude and inadequate. He had no great gift of introspection, nor of transposing himself into the place of another. But his own proper feelings were deep and strong, and of power to express himself he had unparalleled store.

The beauty and girlish charm of Helena, together with o. her ready compliance to his demands, carried him off his, feet, and, unrestrained by the knights unwritten law, he expressed his feelings with unhesitating frankness.

So Helena appears as Bathsheba bathing, as Chaste ., V Susannah, as Dido, as Andromeda, each and all unmistakably Helena, her undisguised portrait from head to. (. heel. The Pelisse and the Dido alone were not allowed vi to leave his own studio, the rest were paintings executed in the ordinary course of his artists business life. In a painting entitled Love and Wine he portrays not only Helena, but himself with her, as the figures of the composition. This mood of intoxication and unrestrained expression is perhaps most clearly displayed in the large canvas known as the Offering to Venus, now in the

Vienna Gallery. It was painted in 1630, or the year following. After criticising some defects in its composition M. Emile Michel expresses as follows his admiration of its parts, together with his bewilderment at the paradox which the painters character presented to his mind: " Many details call for admiration. For example, the beautiful girl in the centre, who with a superb gesture, gracefully hands Venus a mirror in order that she may contemplate her beauty; two women on the right dressed in black, who hold by the hand two pretty children whom they intend to consecrate to the goddess; then the evolutions and dances of the little cupids laden with flowers and fruits, who embrace each other and gambol joyously at the foot of the altar. The left side is perhaps even finer, with the elegant figures of the nymphs, whose supple bodies bend and curve, excited by the wanton dance. Their cavaliers, two vigorous men and a satyr drunk with sensuality, hold them in a close embrace; their arms are about their waists, they seek their rosy lips, their hands stray over their bodies, and Helena, always Helena, smiling and languid, lifted up by the satyr, who presses her, palpitating against his tawny breast, half turns her pretty head towards the spectator. Nature herself seems to share in the festival, the blue sky is sprinkled with flakes of silver, and a spring breaks into cascades under a rock, on the summit of which is a temple with white colonnades, troops of cupids come to drink of its waters, and near by are trees, the shade of which invites lovers meetings. Wherever we look we see attractive images, charming forms, pearly tones, silver grays, pale pink, fresh green, with opalescent transparencies made to give pleasure to the eyes. The old painter shows the measure

e-1 of his genius better than ever before in this joyous hymn of love sung in honour of his young wife. His talent was never more masterly, bold or delicate, than in these dreams of pleasure evolved from his imagination. The richness of his nature does

not prevent our astonishment at the curious versatility of his complex mind, capable of such strange combinations. How could the sincere catholic and the painter who indulged in such bold audacities co-exist? How could this man each morning after hearing mass calmly take up his brushes and paint these licentious and feverish images with a firm sure hand?"

With the *Offering to Venus* must be classed the *Garden of Love*, in the Prado; this, a lusty forerunner of the *Elegant Conversations*, to be painted a century later by Watteau and others, is another amorous scene, in a garden; but the figures, costumed as ladies and gentlemen of his own day, are somewhat more restrained in gesture than those in *The Offering to Venus*. It is possible that the courtly dalliance and pastimes witnessed in the palaces of Mantua and other Italian cities suggested to him the form of his idea, the spirit was that of his own mood of intoxication. Allied to this, and painted but two years earlier, is the *Flemish Kermesse*, a picture of unrestrained peasant revelry. Though in the later picture all is courtly elegance, and in the earlier the last word of coarse rudeness, the two are complementary to each other and alike the product of the same mood.

One other painting of this period, also inspired by the beauty of Helena, but expressing a happier vein of his emotion than the foregoing three, is *TTOW Lu bt* found in the National Gallery, this is *The Judgement of Paris*. It was painted in or about 1630, and is perhaps one of Rubens nearest approaches to a realization of classic beauty. In the Paris and his attendant we see the same touch as in an Apollo introduced into one of the Medici panels, beautiful idealized form, a realization of his own theory respecting the imitation of statues, on which he had written a valuable and suggestive treatise. The female figures of course lack this idealizing touch. We have, as was to be expected, merely three poses of Helena, but Helena treated with unwonted reserve, and the eye, delighted with the exquisite colour and glistening flesh texture, almost forgets to note the commonplace quality of the figures general outlines. Such as they are, with their lustre of surface, they are shown up against trees in deep shadow. This contrast, together with judicious points of brighter colour, and the characteristic blending of reds in the other portions of the work make the picture one among the masters most charming creations.

In addition to the subject pictures, dominated by the Helena influence, we have a large number of portraits of his second wife. She is represented by herself, in his company, and with their children; Helena stands, sits, walks, wears a mantle, holds a fan, is bonnetted or bareheaded. A half-length portrait of her painted in 1639, and now in the Munich Gallery, brings her personality very vividly before us, plump and pretty, amiable too, most handsomely dressed and pleased to be so. One begins to wonder if, after all, the pretty rhapsodies recorded on the rare beauties of the "new Helen" were but flattery offered to Rubens himself by his over-complaisant friends.

Quite the most interesting of the Helena portraits is one painted very shortly after their marriage, showing her with her husband walking in their garden. One is introduced to their almost princely surroundings,—the ornate renaissance portico of the pavilion, the handsome fountain, the well-grown garden, and carefully tended flowers, the favourite dog, the gorgeous peacock, together with the domestic turkey and its chicks,—all speak of taste and wealth and kindliness. Leading his wife, is the ageing

painter, dressed in sombre velvet and with his figure somewhat bowed. Helena, who is placed to the front, and to whose plump beauty her husband serves as foil, turns almost fully round to the spectator in the act of addressing an attendant page. The picture records a happy moment, and expresses a more restful mood than we perceive in most of the Helena pictures. It possesses even something of idyllic grace, and forms, in sentiment, a pendant to the earlier bridal group of Peter Paul under the honeysuckle arbour with his excellent companion, Isabella Brant.

This garden scene leads us insensibly to that great group of landscapes which was one of the most notable products of his later years. Of those which may be assigned to certain dates, we have two between 1635 and 1640, five belong to 1636, two to 1637, one to 1638, and four to 1640, the last year of his life, or we should rather say the last half year, since he died on May 30th of that year. In addition to these, whose dates are definitely ascertained, there is a number of others making, with the inclusion of those executed in his earlier years, a total of forty-one.

Rubens as a landscapist occupies an important place, not so much from the number of his works, though that, as we have seen, is by no means inconsiderable, but from the fact that he definitely advanced the art, lifting it from the older academic limitations into the freedom of an independent existence, as an art sufficient unto itself.

It was after an interval of about twenty years, and on his settlement in the Chateau de Steen, that his attention was attracted a second time to landscape: and then, as was his wont, he bent upon it his whole power, with the result that probably in no field of art has his influence been more profound and lasting. He was the precursor of that great landscape school, Netherlandish and Dutch, which was at once realistic and poetic. Perhaps even the lonely genius of Rembrandt would not have penetrated so far into the secrets of earth's beauty, had not the only less great Peter Paul pursued that path before him.

Rubens landscapes of this later period must be divided into two groups; those belonging to the one were but sketched in by him, and carried on by his pupil Van Uden, and then retouched by Rubens as he afterwards saw fit. These are the more numerous, and are treated in a somewhat decorative style, which takes from their value as pure landscape. The Philemon and Baucis, at Vienna, The Return from Work, and the Ulysses disembarking, both in the pitti, are of this order. The other, and infinitely more valuable, group, on all accounts, is of works done entirely by his own hand. We are fortunate to possess two of the finest examples of this latter class in the National Gallery, viz., The Sunset, an absolute gem of colour and poetic rendering, and the better known Chateau de Steen. This latter is a landscape with his own house introduced merely as one of the features of the whole composition; the painting is not a portrait of his castle, it is rather the home scene, that which daily refreshed his eyes in his hardly earned and richly merited retirement and rest. We see it in its autumn aspect, a living, glowing picture. Of this, as of all his great landscapes, it may be said: "It is no longer an inanimate slice of nature cut haphazard out of the landscape, but an epitome of all its glowing energies."¹ In this last phrase M. Michel touches the key-note of Rubens landscape. His powers, so fully charged with vitality, when restricted to the study of nature, seem to grasp her very heart, and not only her mere semblance. He learned her in all aspects, accepting his impressions directly from

her: and while condensing them into this or that complete picture, he taught his hand to stay its accustomed decorative sweep at that just point which best expressed the mood, the character, or the moment which, for the time, was impressing upon him its influence. Sunset is a much favoured motive; twilight, so elusive and delicate, he also interpreted; and again, the storm, the rainbow, cattle in their pasture, reflections in placid water,—and with all these elements of pure nature, so-called, he also grouped from time to time, in due proportion and subordination, rustic incidents where human action is in harmony with the other elements of his scene. In this he was mindful that the additional interest should in no way tend to reduce the landscape to a background, but rather effect a more complete "epitome of natures energies." This rustic humanity was the natural complement of a cultivated landscape, depending for its character on tillage and harvesting, the persons actually engaged, hardly raising themselves in individuality apart from, or beyond, the l E. Michel, Rubens.

other natural and vital forces necessary to a true and complete presentation.

The Rainbow Landscape in the Wallace Collection is an excellent instance of these energetic epitomes. We have a characteristic Netherlandish landscape. A field partly mown, the road winding through it, and a loaded wain passing along; a blue distance fades away towards the horizon full of delicate indications of detail and interest; a storm has passed away and a rainbow arches the sky; a pond in the foreground is enlivened by ducks, cows are grouped on its banks and reflected on its smooth surface; a group of peasants, a man and two girls, advance along the road. A line of ruddy colour binds the various elements of the composition, and give it generally an autumnal tone; the sleek chestnut horses in the full sunlight start the note; it is carried along by the red bodice of one of the girls, the bronzed skin of the man, and trails off into the distance in the line of scarlet poppies which fringe the edge of the still uncut portion of the corn. To a cursory glance this is all, every part falling into its place serves to make up a perfect picture,—it is only after a very careful examination of all the parts that the additional presence of a little rustic comedy makes itself apparent. The figures are but sketched in with the lightest touch, to preserve the just proportion of the epitome, and yet these master-strokes tell the irresistible little tale that has caught the painters humour, and is in itself of such primitive truth. The swain of the sunburnt skin is walking between the two girls, the while paying his clumsy compliment to but one of them. This, we see, would be of small matter to the second damsel had not the fact been observed by another. The waggoner with the loaded

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wain has just passed, and thought the situation called for a joke: at once the girls pride is in arms, and she smarts under what is now made to appear a slight. The whole story is given, or rather suggested by a sweep or two of the brush, and is, as it were, there and not there, just as the observer chooses, so delicately is it indicated. We have given us, in fact, no inanimate slice of landscape but an epitome of all its energies, with the balance so exquisitely adjusted that even the rural comedy is but complementary to the rest, and without any degree of self-assertion. To this last stage of the painters career belongs also a remarkable group of altar-pieces,—the sum of work done at this time is almost incredible. We have the landscapes executed

at Steen, with presumably most of the paintings inspired by Helena; there was the colossal labour of the decoration of the city of Antwerp for the triumphal entry of the Cardinal-Infant, and the Ovid series, both probably executed in the big town studio; then dovetailing into all this mass of varying interests we find a succession of religious pictures, principally altar-pieces. Three of these call for special notice. One is a Madonna with Saints, sometimes, as by M. Fromentin, called St. George. This is the altar-piece of the Rubens mortuary chapel in the church of St. Jacques in Antwerp; placed in the position it still occupies by the express wish of the painter, it serves as an absolutely fitting memorial. By universal consent this painting ranks among his finest works, his most admirable qualities as artist being all displayed in its execution. The canvas is a square, the corners, for the most part in deep shadow, serve to throw the principal interest towards the upper centre. As regards its "arabesque," the main lines of the composition sweep round in circular fashion so as to give the idea of a tondo set in a square. So great is the clearness of colour, and transparency of the flesh tints, that this luminous centre gleams out of the obscurity of the little chapel on even a dark autumn day. Touches of beautiful red contrast with the exquisite flesh colours, and there is a total absence of the heavy red which so frequently loads his other work. Forming themselves into a partial framework for the central group are St. Jerome and St. George, the tawny skin of the one and the armour of the other acting as foil to the delicate tints of the female group surrounding the Holy Child. Yet though one uses perforce the words "gleam" and "glow" and "brilliant," in trying to describe this marvel of colour blending, there is, in actual fact, no truly brilliant colour patch in the whole picture, withal the entire central portion has the effect of a richness not to be surpassed. This is Rubens' grand achievement,—his realization by his own hand of the idea which had seized upon him when he first saw triumphant art in Venice. His colours now are fused and blended, contrasted and harmonized, revealed and withdrawn, still gleaming, into a luminous shade so that his pictures become a play of iridescence that is of indescribable beauty. When, as in the case of this Madonna and Saints, there is added to the visual beauty a certain spiritual appeal and exaltation, the observer cannot but be lost in admiration of the master hand and creator mind which brought such works into being.

The other two paintings which we must specially consider are both in the Brussels Museum, and by a happy arrangement hang on the same wall in the great gallery, where they may be seen to the best advantage; they are respectively the Martyrdom of St. Lievin and the Ascent of Calvary, and belong to the years 1635 and 1637. "The Calvary and the St. Lievin," says Delacroix, "form the culminating point of Rubens' Maestria" and few, looking at them, will wish to dispute the dictum.

Accepting these two as Rubens' prime masterpieces, it may be well at this point to try to realize what was the unique achievement of this great master in all the varied and immense labour of his life. He was great as decorator, as colourist, in landscape art and portraiture, but in all these realms he has rivals; what is there in his work that is specially and peculiarly his own, that gives him his proper and distinctive place among the masters that none other can challenge?

For the space of a few lines *il faut reculer pour mieux sauter*. Greek art, we say, is the art of beauty and of joy. Christian art set before itself, paradoxically, from the time

it reached adolescence, the task of expressing pain. Its central subject is an execution by torment, its secondary subjects are largely torments likewise, endured by followers of the chief Victim. Italian artists accepted the subjects, but in their treatment they eliminated the pain and the repulsive elements incidental to torture. Their Christ is crucified, but the body does not suffer, it is represented as a symbol of the spiritual fact behind. With the influence of Italy fresh upon him, Rubens painted after this tradition in his *Elevation of the Cross* in Antwerp Cathedral. But Peter Paul was by temperament no mystic, and, painting from his own inspiration, his method is opposed to that of Italy; the Christ of his imagination, if crucified, must suffer. He sets himself accordingly, either consciously or unconsciously, the great task of painting pain, and yet creating beauty in the picture. From his standpoint of literal imagination there was no other way. This then is his unique achievement, by which he makes for himself his own distinctive place among the great painters of the world. Exhibited in the highest degree in his great religious pictures we see the same gift exercised on a lower plane in even the *Silenus Processions*, the ugly and the painful transmuted by his magic into a something that commands our admiration. How far he accomplished his task on the higher plane of the great religious picture we may judge best by those to be seen in Belgium. Some instances there are of failure, from this point of view, and despite technical excellence the horror is almost too great to look upon, as in the celebrated *Christ a la paille*, and even the *Coup de Lance*; but again, it is here we see his supreme successes. We have already noted *The Last Communion of St. Francis*, and the two paintings, already alluded to as belonging to these last years, are the culmination of his labours, and the full achievement of this special task.

The Martyrdom of St. Lievin is a scene of unmitigated horror, as regards subject; in its treatment it is attuned to a scheme of gray, shown up by gleaming high lights and touches of vivid red. The story of the picture is direct and obvious; the deed is perpetrated with callous brutality, the saint's tongue torn out and given to dogs. To the martyr's agonized eyes are visible two rosy cherubs descending with palms and victors' crown; avenging angels, by no means graceful figures, break through the dark clouds, on the other hand, with thunderbolts ready to hurl against the torturers; those who see them are terror-stricken, the rest continue their murderous work. Re-

Brussels Gallery

THE ASCENT OF CALVARY voltingly horrible as subject, it is told without flinching or blinking one sanguinary detail, and yet the picture is a marvel of beauty, and that not through brilliancy of tint. Seen from a distance there is one salient spot of colour only, the executioners' red cap; but for the rest, there is the master's unexampled breaking of the colours one into the other, resulting in iridescent radiance rather than brilliance of colour contrast, in which the details of horror are lost sight of, and only the general sentiment of pain, with that of the final triumph remain. The blended reds and grays play, like stringed and wind instruments, one over against the other, creating by their combination a perfect glamour of beauty that defies description.

The Ascent of Calvary is even nobler in achievement, as it is in subject. It too, like the *St. Lievin*, is pitched to a tone of gray; an ashen atmosphere encircles it from left to right, round up to nearly the starting-point, leaving the centre in a gleam of light, as it were shooting through a rift in the circumambient cloud. Into this scheme of a

sunset-reddened gray we have woven the tragic picture of the Ascent of Calvary. One sees the gray rock of the hillside ahead, and behind it are disappearing two pikes of just vanishing horsemen; two more cavaliers with waving banners follow, the dulled hue of the flags against the gray sky give a general lurid aspect to the air, while the mens gleaming armour shows out at once blacker and whiter than the cloud against which they are outlined. A third horseman to the right, with fluttering red garment, makes a vivid splash of colour contrasting strongly with the prevailing gray, and relieving the awful sombreness. The haunches of the last, a gray horse, are white, and throw up, by contrast, the spot of deepest shadow in the picture, which comes just below. The cavalcade thus far has seemed a triumph to escort some mundane hero, but seeking Him,—the central point for which all the rest is brought together,—we find Him in this spot of deepest shade. The hero has fallen, and in His dark robe almost lies upon the ground. Leaning upon His hands and turning a pallid face, worn almost to death, He tries to rise. Two brown-skinned men lift the cross from His weakened shoulders. Veronica has pressed forwards, we hardly notice that she wears the form of Helena; here she is a faithful one, and she wipes the pale brow with her white veil, which shading off into darkness as it touches her own arms and shoulders, merges into that of her black robe. Below, bringing up the rear of this strange procession, are the two thieves, half naked and bound. With the fewest touches possible they are indicated, so that they may fill up the measure of the whole tragedy without taking from the importance of the central group; but each master-stroke tells. One of the men, a hulking fellow with ruddy hair and face, is almost unmanned by fear, one sees the gleam of terror in his eye. The other, older and feebler, is pallid and hardly conscious now, numbed by anticipation which has overtaken the reality. Mingling with the central group are the daughters of Jerusalem and their children, grieving, but restrained in action as in expression. The absence of any supernatural element preserves the unbroken dignity of the work, and is one of its points of superiority over the St. Lievin, for Rubens was no true seer of the unseen, and was never at his best when trying to represent it. For the rest we find, as in the St. Lievin, the supreme mastery of colour blending and fusion, which touches the familiar incidents afresh, and places them in a new and subtle atmosphere of indescribable poetry. Peter Paul is again representing his Hero, Him of the Elevation and the Deposition, and with all the added powers which the years had given him, he accomplished the task. Only when seen can the full beauty of the painting be realized. Truly, in every part, in every sense, this painting is a culmination; the masters mastery is absolute, and incontestably in its own peculiar fashion it is unrivalled.

Fortunes favourite all through his life, it is only in harmony with all that went before, that the last works to be considered are those which command our highest praise. Before his landscapes, those " epitomes of natures glowing energies," and before these last great altar-pieces we may admire without stint or qualification; here we forget alike his limitations, and his moments of over-exuberance, and remembering only his nobility and grandeur, take our leave.

CATALOGUE OF THE PRINCIPAL WORKS OF RUBENS

Arranged according to the Galleries in which they are to be found.

Students desiring to consult a complete list of the Masters works, including drawings, studies, and illustrations of books, are referred to M. Max Roose's invaluable "Catalogue de L'Œuvre de Rubens en Gravure et en Photographie exposé au Musée des Beaux-Arts à Anvers" (1890), printed in Antwerp, Imprimerie J. E. Buschman, Rempert de la porte du Rhin.

AUSTRIA. VIENNA.—THE IMPERIAL GALLERY.

The Miracles Of St. Francis Xavier. Painted in 1619 or 1620 for the high altar of the Jesuit church in Antwerp.

The Miracles Of St. Ignatius Loyola. Painted in 1620 for the high altar of the Jesuit church in Antwerp.

The Offering To Venus. Painted in 1630 or 1631.

The Pelisse. Painted towards 1630.

There are also others of minor interest. Still further examples are in the Academy of Fine Arts, and in the

LICHTENSTEIN GALLERY.

The History Of Decius Mus. Painted in 1618 for certain merchants of Genoa.

Sketches For The Henry IV Gallery. Painted by order of Marie de Medici for the Luxembourg Palace in 1628 and 1630. Left unfinished.

There is also a number of portraits.

BELGIUM. ANTWERP MUSEUM.

The "Christ A La Faille." A triptych. No date assigned by M. Roose.

The "Coup De Lance," or Christ Between Thieves. Painted in 1620 for the high altar of the church of the Recollets at Antwerp, at the expense of Nicholas Rockox.

The Adoration Of The Magi. Painted in 1624 for the high altar of the Abbey of St. Michel.

The Last Communion Of St. Francis. Painted in 1619 for the church of the Recollets at Antwerp, at the expense of Caspar Charles.

Portrait Of G. Gervatius. Painted towards 1628.

The Collection contains nineteen other paintings of less importance and three sketches. Further, on the ground floor of the Museum is an almost complete collection of reproductions of Rubens works, of immense value to the student.

CATHEDRAL OF NOTRE DAME.

The Raising Of The Cross. Painted in 1610 for the high altar of the church of St. Walburge at Antwerp.

The Descent From The Cross. A triptych. Painted from 1611 to 1614 for the altar of the Brotherhood or Guild of the Arquebusiers in the cathedral of Antwerp.

The Assumption Of -the Virgin. Finished in 1626. Painted at the expense of the Dean of the cathedral Jean del Rio, for the high altar of the cathedral of Antwerp, the position it still occupies.

CHURCH OF ST. JACQUES.

The Madonna With Saints. Sometimes called The St. George. Painted in 1639 or 1640, and placed over the altar of the mortuary chapel of Rubens, the position it still occupies.

THE CHURCH OF ST. PAUL.

The Flagellation. Painted in 1617 for the church of the Dominicans in Antwerp.

BRUSSELS.—PALAIS DES BEAUX-ARTS.

The Adoration Of The Magi. Painted towards 1615 for the high altar of the Capucin church at Tournai.

The Ascent Of Calvary, sometimes called The Bearing Of The Cross. Finished in 1637. Executed for the Abbey church of Affligem.

The Martyrdom Of St. Lievin. Painted towards 1635 for the high altar of the Jesuit church of Ghent.

Portrait Of Jacqueline Van Caestre, Wife Of Jean- Charles De Cordes. Painted 1617-1618.

Portrait Of Jean Charles De Cordes. Painted in 1617-1618.

The Collection contains ten other paintings and sketches.

GHENT.—CHURCH OF ST BAVON.

The Conversion Of St. Bavon. Painted in 1624 for the high altar, at the expense of the Bishop Antoine Triest. K

MALINES.—CHURCH OF NOTRE DAME.

The Miraculous Draught Of Fishes. Triptych. Painted in 1618-1619 for the altar of the Fishermans Company of Malines.

CHURCH OF ST. JOHN.

The Adoration Of The Magi. Triptych. Painted for the high altar of the church in 1619. It still occupies that position.

DENMARK.

COPENHAGEN.—GALLERY OF CHRISTIANSBORG. Portrait Of Yrsselius. Painted towards 1630.

FRANCE. PARIS.—THE LOUVRE.

The History Of Marie De Medici. Painted by the order of Marie de Medici for the Luxembourg Palace, from 1622 to 1625.

The Adoration Of The Magi. Painted probably in 1627, for the widow of Pierre Pecquius, who gave it to the church of the Annonciades in Brussels.

The Kermesse. Painted towards 1636.

Portrait Of Helena Fourment, and a number of other minor works.

In the museums and galleries of Bordeaux, Grenoble, Lille, Lyons, Nancy, Valenciennes, respectively, are further examples, but not of premier importance.

GERMANY. BERLIN.—MUSEUM.

In this collection are seven of Rubens works, but of minor interest.

CASSEL GALLERY.

The Flight Into Egypt. Painted in 1614, and four other works of less importance.

DRESDEN GALLERY.

A Drunken Hercules. Painted in Italy for the Duke of Mantua from 1600 to 1608.

A Boar Hunt. Painted between 1612 and 1615, and other works of less importance.

MUNICH GALLERY.

This is the largest and most generally representative collection of Rubens work, and includes a number of the most notable examples, among these are

The Fall Of The Rebel Angels. Painted in 1620, for a church of Neubourg, at the expense of Wolfgang Wilhelm, Duke of Neubourg.

The Fall Of The Damned. Painted towards 1614.

The two Last Judgements. Large and small. Painted in 1618, and about 1615 respectively, the former at the expense of the Duke of Neubourg for the Jesuit church of Neubourg. It is however largely assistants work.

The Battle Of The Amazons. Painted between 1610 and 1612.

The Procession Of Silenus. Painted towards 1618.

Portrait Group Of The Earl And Countess Of Arundel. Painted in 1620.

Portraits Of Rubens And Isabella Brant In The Honeysuckle Arbour. Painted in 1609 or 1610.

Rubens And Helena Fourment Walking In Their Garden. Painted in 1630 or 1631.

In addition to these are many others, amounting to a total of seventy-six works.

GREAT BRITAIN.

LONDON.—THE NATIONAL GALLERY.

The Judgement Of Paris. Painted towards 1636.

The Chapeau De Foil. A portrait of Susanne Fourment, sister of the painters second wife. Painted towards 1620.

Autumn Landscape. With View Of The Chateau De Steen. Painted towards 1636.

A Landscape And Sunset, and several other figure compositions.

THE WALLACE COLLECTION.

The Rainbow Landscape. Painted towards 1636.

Portrait Of Isabella Brant, and one or two others.

Throughout the country are numerous other examples in the hands of private owners.

HOLLAND. AMSTERDAM.—RIJKS MUSEUM.

Portrait Of Helena Fourment. Painted between 1630 and 1632.

Sketch for the great Brussels Ascent Of Calvary, and two others.

THE HAGUE.—THE MAURITSHUIS.

The Earthly Paradise. Painted in collaboration with Jan Breughel, the most successful of these joint productions.

ITALY. FLORENCE.—THE UFFIZI.

The Battle Of Ivry and the Entry Of Henry IV Into Paris, being the two most nearly completed compositions for the Henry IV Gallery. Painted by order of Marie de Medici in 1628 and 1630. The Uffizi also contains several other works, portraits, and subject compositions.

THE PITTI.

The Philosophers. A portrait group, including the painter himself and his brother Philip. In the opinion of M. Max Rooses painted in 1602 at Verona.

Landscape The Return From The Fields. Painted towards 1637, and others of less interest.

GENOA.—THE CHURCH OF SAN AMBROGIO.

The Circumcision and The Miracles Of St. Ignatius Loyola. Painted in 1620 for the Jesuit church of Genoa, at the expense of Nicolas Pallavicini.

MILAN.—THE BRERA GALLERY.

The Last Supper. Painted in 1632, for the altar of the Holy Sacrament, in the church of St. Rombout, in Malines, at the expense of Catherine Lescuyer.

ROME.—THE CAPITOL.

ROJtutuS A3TO REMUS.

RUSSIA.

ST. PETERSBURGH.—THE HERMITAGE.

Herods Banquet. Christ In The House Of Simon The Pharisee. Painted between 1615 and 1620.

Portraits of Isabella Brant and Helena Fourment, and other examples, including sketches of the decorations for the triumphal entry into Antwerp of the Cardinal-Infant.

SPAIN.

MADRID.—THE PRADO.

The Adoration Of The Magi. Painted in 1610, by the order of the magistracy of Antwerp for the States Chamber of the Town Hall. Removed to Madrid, and retouched by Rubens, at Madrid, in 1628-1629.

The Garden Of Love. Painted about 1638.

La Ronda, Or The Dance Of Villagers. Painted about 1639.

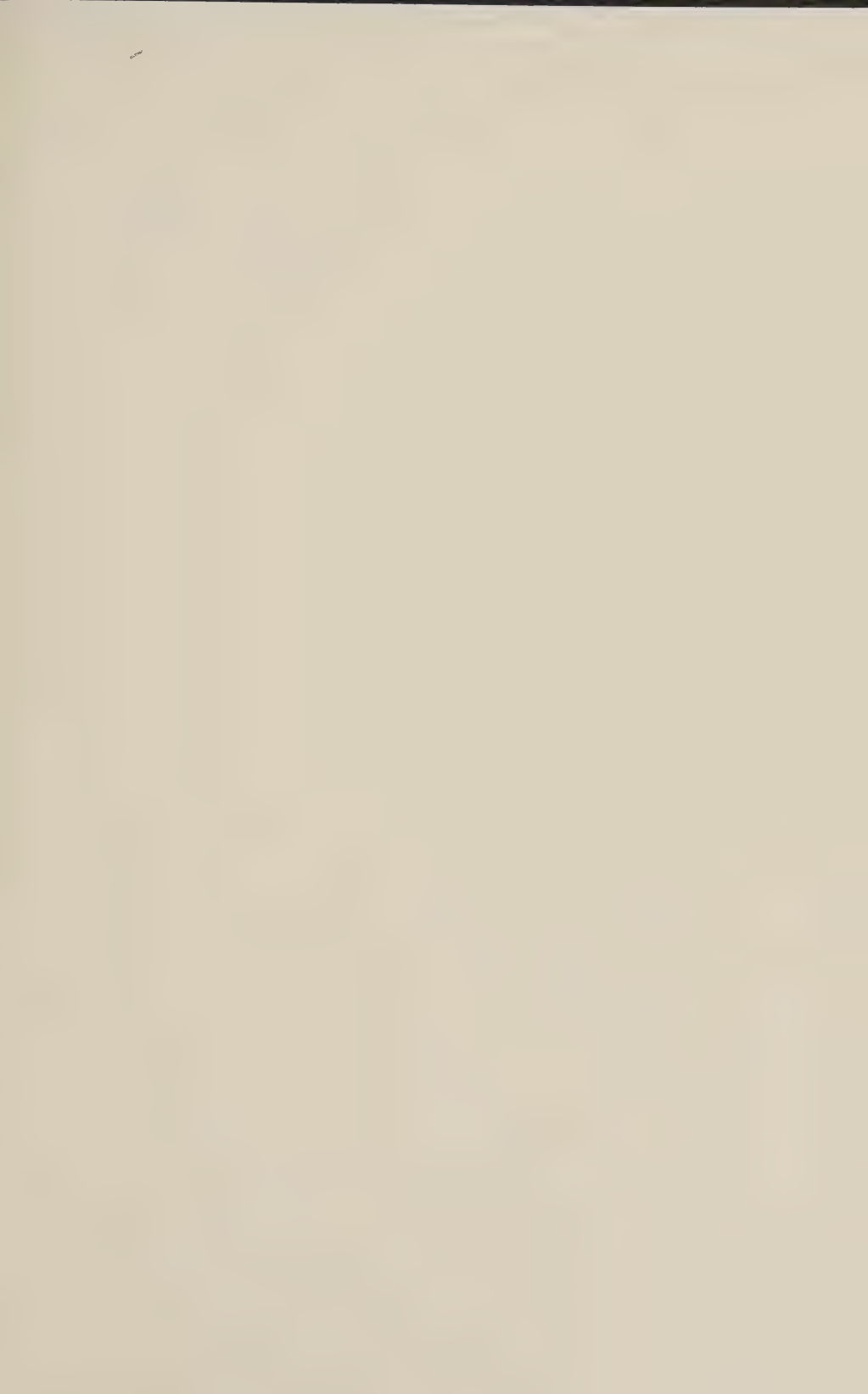
The sketches for the series of The Triumph Of The Eucharist, and other works of less importance, in all sixty-five examples.

SWEDEN.

STOCKHOLM.—MUSEUM.

Susanna And The Elders. Painted about 1620.

The Three Graces. Painted about 1620.



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